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Temperate Semantic Conventionalism

Abstract: I return to Davidson's "anti-conventionalism" papers to assess his famous arguments against the sufficiency and necessity of conventions for successful linguistic communication. Davidson goes beyond the common contention that the basic conventional layer of meaning, one that is secured by interlocutors' shared competence in their common language, must often be supplemented in rich and inventive ways. First, he maintains that linguistic understanding is never exclusively a matter of mere decoding, but *always* an interpretative task that demands constant additional attention to the indeterminately various cues and clues available. More radically still, Davidson denies that linguistic conventions are even needed. In particular, he argues against the fairly consensual thesis there is some essential element of conventionality in literal meaning. This still represents a very distinctive contribution to the persistent and tumultuous discussion over the relative natures and limits of semantics and pragmatics.

I maintain that Davidson is only partially right in his claims. I agree with him about the general insufficiency of conventions for linguistic communication. I develop an argument supporting the thesis that genuine pursuit of linguistic understanding can never take the form of uncritical conformity to a fixed norm. I am also convinced that Davidson is right about the occasional dispensability of conventions. Often enough, as Davidson's examples show, literal meanings are improvised on the go – that is, interlocutors manage to coordinate on the meaning of some exchanged expression without the benefit of a shared convention governing that use. I reject, however, general non-necessity. I consider in some detail Davidson's argument from radical interpretation and conclude that it fails.

Keywords: semantic conventionalism, semantic anti-conventionalism, Donald Davidson, literal meaning, malapropisms, radical interpretation

1 Introduction

There is a tempting view of linguistic practices and interpretation that Davidson identifies and denounces as inadequate in a number of texts from the eighties and nineties. Let us call it "the rigid conception" of linguistic communication. According to it, "in learning a language, a person acquires the ability to operate in accord with a precise and specifiable set of syntactic and semantic rules; verbal

communication depends on speaker and bearer sharing such an ability, and it requires no more than this" (Davidson 1994, p. 110).

This view is endorsed in different forms, to different extents, by different authors.[1] The crucial commonality is the placing of some notion of *regularity*, *convention* or *rule* at the core of our linguistic competence, and the reduction of interpretation to the exercise of a very specific, and potentially automatic, ability – that of calculating the standard meanings of uttered expressions in accordance with some system or code commonly known by all participants. Such a straightforward method would release interpreters – at least in some cases – from the need for any additional inquiry into the speaker's mind and background. Davidson argues, against this view, that the notions in question are not so important or central to successful linguistic interchanges.

In Section 2, I circumscribe the discussion to Lewis' notion of *convention*. I develop in some detail Lewis' convincing analysis of these social structures, and elaborate on how they can be used to support and facilitate communication and interpretation. In Section 3, I turn to a second notion, *first meaning*. Davidson motivates it first as a key piece in his account of situations where the interchange of literal meanings among speakers is successful despite the fact of words not being used to carry their conventional or standard meaning. Equipped with these notions, we'll finally be in an adequate position to present, in Section 4, Davidson's specific form of anti-conventionalism. He does not dispute the pervasiveness and practical convenience of conventions of meaning in verbal communication. What he disputes is that there is a more intimate relation than that. What he disputes is the thesis that language and linguistic practices are essentially conventional.

In Section 5, I finally turn to the arguments behind Davidson's position. Davidson invokes malapropisms, and other related occurrences of semantic innovation, to make a solid case, illustrated with abundant examples, in favor of occasional and local insufficiency and non-necessity of conventions. How far can these results be extended? In Section 5.1, I follow an argument in favor of general insufficiency. The argument, latent in Davidson's framing of the discussion, is first picked up by Pietroski, and then reformulated by Lepore and Ludwig. I introduce some readjustments and conclude that the argument successfully supports the general claim. In Section 5.2, I consider the argument from radical interpretation in favor of general non-necessity. This is the clearest argument

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1 Aristotle and Locke are often referred as classical precursors of the view. Very recently, Ernest Lepore and Matthew Stone, offer an especially pure formulation of the doctrine: *Imagination and Convention* (2015).

available. It is, at least, strongly suggested by Davidson, and often identified in the relevant literature. I contend that the argument fails.

In defense of an alternative conception, he sets himself to show that conventions are neither sufficient nor necessary for linguistic communication. I present and inspect several (more or less straightforwardly) Davidsonian arguments to that effect. I conclude that there is a good case for the general insufficiency of conventions in interpretation, but that the arguments for non-necessity fall short of demonstrating a strong and general dispensability of conventions.

2 Convention

There is a discernible emphasis on *convention*, even if Davidson often shifts from that notion to others closely related – that is, there is also talk of *regularities*, *rules*, *norms*, and maybe more. I will focus exclusively on convention as it appears to be the ultimate target of Davidson's arguments and positions.

Davidson, along with most others in this discussion, refers to David Lewis' analysis of the notion (Lewis 1969 and 1975). According to Lewis, conventions arise as rational solutions to coordination problems. Coordination problems are problems involving more than one agent, where there is a predominant coincidence of interest among the participants, and where the success of each agent in reaching some desired outcome is dependent upon her ability to concert her course of action with those of the other participants. Participants must form their strategies based on their expectations concerning others. No individual move can warrant a favorable result in such situations; only coordinated actions can pull it off. Lewis provides several simple and illuminating examples of coordination problems such as *meeting someone*, *resuming an interrupted phone conversation*, *rowing together*, *driving on two-lane roads*, and more (Lewis 1969, p. 5 ff.).

For a coordination problem to call for a conventionalized solution, another decisive feature must be in place: the problem must allow for various solutions equally convenient for those involved. This corresponds to the element of arbitrariness in conventions. If there were good enough independent reasons for agents to converge on a particular solution, a convention would not be required for the same effect. Consider one of Lewis's examples, the coordination problem of how to share a two-lane road. What all drivers wish to avoid is that "some drive in the left lane and some in the right" (ibid. 6), because then "everyone is in danger of collision" (ibid.). But for each driver "[i]t matters little … whether he drives in the left or the right lane, provided the others do likewise" (ibid.). There being

no independent reasons determining a concerted response, this is precisely the kind of case that justifies a convention.

For a convention to arise, it must first happen that some particular coordination strategy becomes collectively focused. This can happen in a number of ways, from explicit agreement to some accidental precedent, or natural saliency. The rest follows rationally. Agents that start with adequate expectations about each other and who share a common interest choose their actions in accordance and manage to coordinate and attain common success. Good results reinforce initial mutual expectations, new successes grow more likely each time, and participants' behavior becomes more and more regular. At some point, a *convention,* in the Lewisian sense, will come to be in force.

Here is a late version of Lewis' analysis, with some trimming:

> A regularity *R*, in action or in action and belief, is a *convention* in a population *P* if and only if, within P, the following six conditions hold. (Or at least they almost hold. A few exceptions to the "everyone"s can be tolerated.)
> 1. Everyone conforms to *R*.
> 2. Everyone believes that the others conform to *R*.
> 3. This belief that the others conform to *R* gives everyone a good and decisive reason to conform to *R* himself. (...)
> 4. There is a general preference for general conformity to *R* rather than slightly-less-than-general conformity. (...)
> 5. *R* is not the only possible regularity meeting the last two conditions. There is at least one alternative *R′* such that the belief that the others conformed to *R′* would give everyone a good and decisive practical or epistemic reason to conform to *R′* likewise; (...)
> 6. Finally, the various facts listed in conditions (1) to (5) are matters of *common* (or *mutual*) *knowledge*: they are known to everyone, it is known to everyone that they are known to everyone, and so on.
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> (Lewis 1975, pp. 164–165)

We can see how it fits perfectly well our previous example. Take, for instance, continental Europe. Every driver drives in the right lane, and everyone expects all other drivers to do the same. The belief that all other drivers will be driving in the right lane gives each driver a good and decisive reason to drive in the right lane. No one would profit from exceptions to this regularity – that is, if most people already drive in the right lane, everyone prefers that all drivers do the same. It would do just as well if all drivers were instead to drive in the left lane. The original choice between left or right is arbitrary as there are no (evident) reasons

to prefer one side or the other. Lastly, all this is common knowledge[2] to all involved: all drivers know all the facts stated above, and know that all drivers know them, and know that all drivers know that all drivers know them, *and so on*. This last condition is meant to *stabilize* the convention. Remember that these are situations where agents must choose their actions based on their expectations about the other agents. Common knowledge of all these facts allows each agent to replicate the others' reasonings and, in general, to grasp the rationality and goodness of the whole arrangement, hence confirming the agent in the persuasion that driving in the right lane is both the thing to be expected and the right thing to do.

How are conventions thus defined to play a role in linguistic communication? Lewis himself applies the notion as the basis of his own foundational semantics. He affirms a conventional relation of linguistic expressions to their meanings. According to his proposal in "Languages and Language", what relates a speaker to her particular language, or idiolect, and her words and sentences to their particular meanings, is a convention of *truthfulness and trust* in that language. This convention is defined as in the above general scheme by replacing "R" with "a regularity of truthfulness and trust in £", where £ is a language, characterized as complex function from expressions to their meanings or truth-conditions, and the conformity to the regularity in question consists of "members of P frequently speak[ing] ... sentences of £ to one another", with speakers trying to utter only sentences they believe true in £, and speakers responding to such utterances "by coming to share th[e relevant] belief ... and adjusting [their] other beliefs accordingly" (Lewis 1975, p. 167).

For present purposes, we can make things simpler and more perceptible by letting go of *trust and truthfulness* and invoking instead *a convention of meaning in £*, where the regularity in question would simply be that of using expressions of £ in accordance with their meaning in £ — that is, if someone utters some linguistic expression *e,* that person (expression) means by it what *e* means in £; if someone hears it uttered, that person responds by coming to take the speaker to have (expression) meant by it what *e* means in £.

However, what we shall be focusing on are not so much the global commitments attached to entire languages, but subsidiary conventions, in some form included therein, that govern the use of each particular expression of the language. Take, for instance, "Snow is white". Following the previous line, we should say that

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2 Lewis settles for *potential* common knowledge, that is, knowledge "available if one bothered to think hard enough" (Lewis 1975, p. 165). I agree with Daniel Nolan when he notes that condition (2) seems somewhat "redundant, given that all the conditions must be common knowledge in the population P" (Nolan 2005, p. 161).

a regularity *R*, in action or in action and belief, is a convention, in a population P, of *using "Snow is white" to (expression) mean that snow is white* if and only if,

1. The members of P conform to the regularity of taking "Snow is white" to (expression) mean that snow is white. That is, if someone utters "Snow is white" that person (expression) means that snow is white; if someone hears it uttered, that hearer responds by taking the speaker to have (expression) meant that snow is white.
2. Everyone believes that the others conform to the regularity of taking "Snow is white" to (expression) mean that snow is white.
3. This belief that the others conform to *the regularity of taking "Snow is white" to (expression) mean that snow is white* gives everyone a good and decisive reason to conform to it.
4. There is a general preference for general conformity to the regularity of taking "Snow is white" to (expression) mean that snow is white.
5. The regularity of taking "Snow is white" to (expression) mean that snow is white has alternatives.
6. All these facts are common knowledge in P.

With this notion of convention in place and these examples, we are now in a better position to consider Davidson's claims about convention's dispensability and insufficiency for linguistic communication. First, however, we must clarify the notions of linguistic communication and interpretative success at stake in his arguments and claims, as well as the central notion of meaning involved.

3 First meaning

When the question is the role of convention in linguistic communication, we must be clear about what defines success in linguistic communication. That definition must be plausible while, at the same time, it must not commit us straightaway to a position for or against Conventionalism. Davidson's notion of "*first meaning*" (Davidson 1986, p. 91) plays the central role in it. Let us uncover its features.

To begin with, the notion we're after is an intention-based notion. Davidson is clear about his conviction that the crucial thing in meaning and communication is being understood as one intends to be understood – coordination is as much at the root of Davidson's view as it was at the root of Lewis'. In his words, the "intention to be taken to mean what one wants to be taken to mean is ... the

only aim that is common to all verbal behavior" (Davidson 1994, p. 120).[3] All successful instances of communication involve the satisfaction of some communicative intention and all conveyed (non-natural) meaning must be specified there, in its correspondent intention.

At the same time, first meaning is intended to be full-fledgedly linguistic. First meanings are articulated by means of expressions integral to a complex system, a language,[4] that allows for the distinctive properties of compositionality, systematicity, and creativity that Davidson himself had such a leading role in calling our attention to (Davidson 1965, 1967). First meanings emerge at a crucial intersection between mind and language. They first link interpersonal understanding to a verbal code, dramatically improving the first and infusing the second with actual content.

The notion of first meaning also brings with it the possibility of a more apt and organized conceptual landscape. Davidson makes clear that we must preserve the traditional distinction "between what a speaker, on a given occasion, means, and what his words mean" (1986, p. 91). However, this distinction should not be secured at the expense of two inadequate conflations, both of intended meaning and non-literal meaning and, especially, of literal meaning and conventional meaning. As Davidson notes, phenomena such as *malapropisms* require us to acknowledge both that literal meaning can happen outside conventions, social institutions and standards, and in direct dependence upon the speaker's communicative intentions.

Linguistic expressions are frequently misused, or used in innovative ways, without the loss of communication and understanding – malapropisms are but one notorious example of that. Speakers often employ words intending them to mean something different from their *standard meanings* and "get away with it" (Davidson 1986, p. 98), i.e. are understood by their audiences as meaning what they actually intended to mean. Mrs. Malaprop produces an utterance of "a nice derangement of epitaphs" and is successfully interpreted as meaning what she intends to mean, i.e. *a nice arrangement of epithets* (Davidson 1986, pp. 103–104). Archie Bunker uses "monogamy" and is successfully interpreted as meaning what he intended to mean, i.e. *monotony* (Davidson 1986, p. 90). Goodman Ace (Davidson 1986, p. 89) explores similar replacements – using, for instance, "granite" instead of "granted" and "baffle" instead of "battle" – only he does so intentionally and much more densely.

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3 See also Davidson (1993, p. 171, and 1986, pp. 92–93 and 98–99).
4 Taken not in the same sense that Davidson has in mind when he issues his anti-conventionalism by denying the existence of languages (cf. Davidson 1986, p. 107).

With *first meaning,* Davidson is forging a notion that allows for the distinction between *literal meaning* and *speaker meaning*, while accommodating the fact that the former might not be standard or conventional – *epithets*, *monotony*, *granted* and *battle* are meant literally in the cases above – but conferred upon the words by means of a communicative intention of the speaker that is adequately recognized by the audience. This even permits us to make sense of cases where speakers have their words understood in non-conventional and non-standard ways and still manage to add to that some extra layer of meaning. Lepore and Ludwig (Lepore and Ludwig 2005, pp. 265–266) elaborate an example. Someone could comment upon Mrs. Malaprop's words, reproducing her own misuses, by saying "And that's a nice derangement of words". In the imagined context, the utterance's *literal* or *first* meaning would be "And that's a nice arrangement of words", but the speaker intends it to be taken as an ironical remark.

The first meaning of an utterance will often correspond to the expression's standard meaning. Often, the first meaning will "come first in the order of interpretation" (Davidson 1986, pp. 91–92). Ultimately, however, it is the speaker's intention that specifies it. First meanings are determined by what the speaker intends her[5] words to mean, i.e. by what Davidson refers to as the speaker's "semantic intention" (Davidson 1993, pp. 170–171),[6] but are only confirmed, so to speak, if the audience manages to recognize and adequately handle that intention.[7]

We are now equipped with the notion of linguistic meaning and the model of successful linguistic communication that matter to our discussion. *First meaning* corresponds to a notion of the *intended, potentially non-conventional and non-standard, literal meaning of an utterance*. Interlocutors manage to communicate linguistically at the basic level here in question when they manage to converge on the first meaning of their utterances. For the purposes of the present discussion, I will accept Davidson's position on the primacy of the notion of *first meaning* and on what constitutes successful linguistic communication without further discussion[8], and assess his anti-conventionalist arguments in those terms.

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5 Whenever possible, to reduce ambiguity, I will reserve male pronouns for *interpreters* and female pronouns for *speakers*.

6 Cf. Davidson (1986, p. 92; 1993, pp. 172–3).

7 See Davidson (1986, p. 98 ff.). Below I'll return to the role of the audience in the determination of first meanings.

8 The actual adequacy of these positions is directly challenged by various authors. See, for instance, Dummett (1986), Green (2001), Reimer (2004) and Camp (2016).

4 Davidson's Anti-Conventionalism

Davidson's position on meaning conventions is complex; he expresses different forms of rejection to different conceptions of an alleged conventional nature of linguistic practices. First of all, he never rejects that there actually are meaning conventions, nor that they are pervasive and quite useful in real instances of communication (Davidson 1994, p. 110; 1982, p. 278). What Davidson rejects is, on the one hand, the *necessity* of such conventions for communicative purposes and, on the other, its *sufficiency* (1994, p. 110; 1982, pp. 278–279).

Second, we must also pay attention to the different types of conventions to which he refers. We must distinguish at least two types of regularities considered by Davidson. The first type of regularity considered determines a strong form of sharing. It consists of "speaker and hearer mean[ing] the same thing by uttering the same sentences" (Davidson 1982, p. 276). Davidson defends that "such conformity, while perhaps fairly common, is not necessary to communication" (Davidson 1982, p. 276). He immediately points to the obvious counterexamples: "[e]ach speaker may speak his different language, and this will not hinder communication as long as each hearer understands the one who speaks" (Davidson 1982, p. 276). Examples include cases of speakers of officially different languages and cases of speakers that consistently pick different words and formulations within the same official language or dialect.

Davidson moves his focus to a second type of regularity. It determines a weaker form of sharing and consists of "speaker and hearer … assign[ing] the same meaning to the speaker's words" (Davidson 1982, p. 277). This time, it does not matter which expressions each interlocutor picks in her utterances, as long as both speaker and hearer are ready to interpret them in the same way. This is the type of regularity we will be focusing on. Not by accident, that is the type of regularity that is involved in meaning conventions of the kind exemplified above for "Snow is white."

Two further ideas are important to bear in mind. First, as Davidson notes: "Regularity in this context must mean regularity over time, not mere agreement at a moment" (Davidson 1982, p. 278). This is necessary to secure a distinction between full participation in a meaning convention and mere momentary convergence upon the first meaning of some utterance. Second, whether or not the regularities in question correspond to any official language or constitute some standard in a wide enough community is not a particularly discernible worry in Davidson's approach. He centers his argumentation on the general case, conventional meanings, of which *official language conventions* and *large community language conventions* would constitute the most typical examples.

Davidson states his anti-conventionalism also in a different guise. In "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs", he famously declares that "there is no such thing as a language, not if a language is anything like what many philosophers and linguists have supposed" (Davidson 1986, p. 107). Naturally, Davidson has no intention of refusing the existence of language, or even languages, *tout court*. What he is refusing is only a very specific conception of language, one that is fit to play the central role in what I have above called the rigid conception of linguistic communication. According to this conception, meanings involved in instances of successful verbal communication must be *systematic*, *shared* and *governed by learned conventions or regularities* (Davidson 1986, p. 93). What Davidson is refusing is the existence of languages as something suited to determine meanings possessing the three characteristics just listed – that is, languages as stable systems of some sort, knowledge of which would be generally shared among the competent speakers of the same linguistic community, and exclusively relied upon for getting to the literal meaning of any utterance produced among them.

Davidson defends that we should let go of the third feature. Meanings, in his alternative conception of linguistic communication, must still be systematic and shared. Only a rich and sufficiently articulated system can offer the expressiveness characteristic of verbal communication. Furthermore, speaker and interpreter still need to converge on the first meanings of the words used during their interchange if communication is to count as being effective. What Davidson questions is the need for such a convergence to be secured beforehand by means of both interlocutors bringing to the conversation an acquired, common, and standing knowledge of the conventions and regularities of the language. Davidson is convinced that the frequent cases of successful communication undisturbed by semantic innovations – which he illustrates with his examples of malapropisms – force us to reconsider and ultimately eliminate the requirement.

Davidson formulates his revision of the rigid conception with the help of the notions of *prior theory* and *passing theory* (Davidson 1986, pp. 100–101). The theories in question would be descriptive meaning theories specifying the meaning for every expression in the linguistic system of reference – truth theories if we follow Davidson's specific approach to the task. Prior theories model the competence or dispositions to linguistic behavior that each participant brings to the conversation. The interpreter's prior theory should characterize his dispositions to interpret his interlocutor prior to actual conversation, and the speaker's prior theory should characterize how she expects the interpreter to understand her words. Prior theories, Davidson maintains, may be discrepant without any loss of communication. Passing theories model verbal dispositions during the interchange, after any relevant news being gathered and processed. The interpreter's

passing theory characterizes how he actually ends up interpreting the speaker's words, while the speaker's passing theory characterizes how she intends him to interpret them. It is passing theories that need to coincide if communication is to be successful. And that is enough to ensure that speakers' words are taken to mean what they intend them to be taken to mean.

According to Davidson's revised view, a language is at most a fleeting thing, fixed only for the instant of communication, and not a stable system shared among all speakers and accounting for their linguistic competence, something to be "learned, mastered or born with" (Davidson 1986, p. 107). What speaker-interpreters carry with them from situation to situation, allowing them to reach a good enough coordination each time, cannot be identified with either prior (Davidson 1986, p. 103) or passing theories (Davidson 1986, p. 102). It is not, in fact, something that could fairly be described as knowledge of a language, whether one imagines it encapsulated in a module or the cognitive possession of the whole mind and person. Even if rooted and dependent upon a general and structural competence comprising "a basic framework of categories and rules, a sense of the way English (or any) grammars may be constructed, plus a skeleton list of interpreted words for fitting into the basic framework" (Davidson 1986, p. 104), speaker-interpreters' performances reveal more than the simple employment of any form of standing knowledge. They reveal the continuous exercise of a dynamic, complex, and high-order capacity, the person's general intelligence, able to serve in communication as well as in other forms of theory building and mundane navigation (Davidson 1986, p. 107). Mindreading is, of course, central in the affair, as the point is always either to get to our interlocutor's communicative intentions or to render one's own adequately accessible. A rich and flexible notion of rationality mediates the encounter and guides the process both ways. To sum it up, we can say that what speaker-interpreters' performances exhibit is the constant practice of rationality and rationalization, one that is supported in all their accumulated knowledge and resources, unrestricted to any special domain – that is, only part of it is strictly linguistic.

The picture just presented constitutes an enlarged rendition of the same anti-conventionalist position described above. In allowing prior theories to diverge, Davidson sustains the insufficiency and non-necessity of conventions and previously learned regularities for communication. The conventions that are in place, where a speaker's and an interpreter's prior theories intersect, are not enough to ensure communication. Prior theories must be revised or confirmed into passing theories. Speakers achieve this not with the help of further conventions and strict strategies, but by making free and ingenious use of their broad rationality in exploring varying and non-chartable provisions of miscellaneous knowledge.

5 Arguing against Conventionalism

It is time now to turn to Davidson's arguments against conventionalism. In support of his claims that conventions are neither necessary nor sufficient for linguistic communication, Davidson invokes the fact that, sometimes, speakers must figure out the meaning of their interlocutors' words without relying on previous knowledge of any prevailing convention. Speakers can do it, and often have no other option (Davidson 1982, p. 278; 1986, pp. 89–90; 1994, p. 115ff.). Malapropisms are taken as central cases in this argument. The examples elaborated above already go to show that, at least occasionally and locally, speakers manage to communicate and understand each other by exploring other means besides shared knowledge of the relevant meaning conventions. There being no linguistic convention of using "baffle" to mean *battle*, knowledge of linguistic conventions is flagrantly *insufficient* to explain how it can happen that on certain particular occasions speaker and hearer manage to converge in this interpretation. From the opposite angle, even without the knowledge of the convention of using "arrangement" to mean *arrangement*, as presumably was the case with Mrs. Malaprop, a speaker can still be understood by her interpreter to mean it – thus showing how conventions can also be *unnecessary*. The important question now is how far these conclusions can be extrapolated. Is there a valid inference from occasional to any general form of insufficiency and dispensability of meaning conventions in communication?

5.1 Arguing against Sufficiency

Are conventions and knowledge of conventions enough to explain and allow for linguistic communication in its familiar form? The most flagrant counterexamples to that hypothesis involve expressions for which there is a standard meaning and a widespread convention governing their use in the community, but which the speaker manages to employ successfully in some alternative way with some non-conventional and non-standard meaning. More generally still, we can also say that each case of successful verbal communication involving the employment of expressions in non-conventional and non-standard ways is a case of insufficiency of conventions, standards, and their correspondent knowledge for communication. Davidson has this argument in mind when he illustrates the existence of such cases of non-conventional successful communication with the

examples provided above. Apart from this, however, he offers no other clear argument against insufficiency, and actually appears much more interested in the second aspect of the problem: necessity.

As things stand, the insufficiency of conventions and standards is secured only at a very local and occasional level. Some extraordinary occasions require speakers to coordinate beyond what is previously fixed and shared among them. But it would seem that, outside of those rare occasions, learned conventions and standards still suffice for communication. We can easily agree that the occasions might not be so rare after all, and that they encompass more than malapropistic uses. There are many other cases of improvisation and innovation: new names, new words, new idioms, new uses. Nonetheless, if insufficiency and the opportunity or need to invest more in communication than one's knowledge of fixed standards and conventions were keyed only to such special moments of innovation, they would still be confined and of little expression in the whole picture of language use.

Pietroski, for one, in a commentary sympathetic to Davidson's position, expands on the topic and suggests an argument supporting the generalization of insufficiency. It appears in a single paragraph that is worth quoting at length.

> Once the distinction between prior and passing theories has been drawn, I take it that the conceptual distinction matters even if the deliverances of prior and passing theories are the same. Not modifying a prior theory is, on my reading of Davidson, just as much an interpretive decision as making a modification; though in the former case, the 'decision' will typically not be associated with any conscious processing or feelings of 'dissonance.' Successful communication is always a matter of converging *passing* theories; and general intelligence is always implicated here, if only by giving 'tacit approval' to the deliverances of prior theories. Moreover, even if such tacit approval is often granted, one cannot speak of rules *governing* passing theories. For the 'rules' could always be overridden in cases of the Malaprop/Donnellan sort; and one cannot capture the extent of these cases formally or in advance.
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> (Pietroski 1994, p. 105)

Pietroski points out that the simple drawing of the conceptual distinction between prior and passing theories creates room for the possibility of a permanent actualization of linguistic dispositions taking place when speakers engage in verbal communication, whether or not changes are actually consummated in the process. He claims that an "interpretive decision", explicit or tacit, is in any case called for, be it to confirm or modify the prior theory, and that this can be so even if the interpreter is unaware of it, phenomenologically speaking. Lastly, he stresses the fact that *the last word* does not belong to the conventions or rules of language, which again supports the idea that there is always interpretation as

well as central and personal control of the interpreter over how to interpret any utterance.

Pietroski is spare in details. Lepore and Ludwig, although close enough to the main line of the argument, expand the discussion in two new directions. They stress the epistemological tone of the argument by bringing *justification* to the fore, and they raise new questions about how to understand *sufficiency/insufficiency of conventions*. The critique of both developments will allow me to arrive to a clearer understanding and a stronger version of the argument.

Lepore and Ludwig find the following argument in Pietroski's passage: since "the possibility a speaker has not used his words in conformity with public norms is ever-present" (Lepore and Ludwig 2005, p. 270), interpreters are called to *justify* their option in either way, that is, whether they decide to go with the conventional interpretation or not. "But since [this] justification will invoke more than knowledge of conventions for the use of words, and even that the speaker is a member of the appropriate linguistic community, it follows that knowledge of conventional meaning is never sufficient for interpretive success" (Lepore and Ludwig 2005, p. 271).

They acknowledge some truth and cogency in this line of reasoning but, at the same time, they note that "it also seems clear that we routinely and successfully interpret others on the basis of taking them to mean what their words mean according to public norms" (Lepore and Ludwig 2005, p. 271). They conclude that, ultimately, it all "boils down to what we intend by saying that knowledge of conventional meanings is sufficient for interpretive success" (Lepore and Ludwig 2005, p. 271). If what it meant is

    i.   "that sometimes, even often, we are not called upon to revise our view that the speaker speaks with the majority" (Lepore and Ludwig 2005, p. 271).

then the argument does not secure generalized insufficiency of conventions. If, on the other hand, what is meant is

    ii.   "that knowledge of conventional meanings all by itself sometimes suffices for interpreting another as speaking in accord with public norms" (Lepore and Ludwig 2005, p. 271).

then we can take the argument to show that conventions are indeed always insufficient for communication. This is Lepore and Ludwig's take on Pietroski's argument. As anticipated above, I would like to press a bit further on the two new developments.

First, I want to challenge the effective availability of alternative interpretations of the hypothesis here at stake – i.e., general insufficiency – that correspond to the alternative interpretations of its counterhypothesis – i.e., general sufficiency – put forward as *i.* and *ii.* in the previous paragraph. Starting with *i.*, it is so flagrantly the case that speakers often conform to conventions and must be interpreted in accordance with them that to question this would be pointless. This form of occasional sufficiency appears beyond dispute, and no interesting and plausible hypothesis of general insufficiency could be offered against it. The relevant question cannot be whether or not *i.* Reading *ii.*, on the other hand, is too open and vague – as Lepore and Ludwig themselves note, insufficiency in this sense would follow from an observation as general and anodyne as the fact "that human beings are in general fallible" (Lepore and Ludwig 2005, p. 271).

I don't think we're so clueless about what's really the matter here. The pertinent question is whether the rigid conception of linguistic communication is still an acceptable account of what takes place at those occasions where meanings are meant and ascribed in accordance with the prevailing conventions, or whether that conception is generally undermined. The pertinent question is whether interpreters are at any time actually relieved of any supplementary work of deeper and complex interpretation, and permitted to rely exclusively on their knowledge of the conventions. Even at those instances where there is no deviation from the communal norm and no revision of the standard or conventional meaning is ultimately called for, interpretation still demands the practice of rationality and rationalization as briefly introduced in the previous section – this is the Davidsonian thesis that genuinely deserves attention and scrutiny.

Second, I want to recommend a change in the argument. I believe the appeal to justification, central in the argument recovered by Lepore and Ludwig, is superfluous and misleading. We can make it sharper if we let it go. It is not only that knowledge of conventions is insufficient to sustain a conventional interpretation of an utterance *in a justified way*; it is more simple and more serious than that. It is that knowledge of conventions is insufficient to sustain a conventional interpretation of an utterance even without the qualification.

As Lepore and Ludwig articulate the *justification* problem, they make it sound as if justifying one's interpretive decision or not is somewhat optional. They even explain, in a footnote, that the argument is conditioned upon a specific

epistemological position that liberally affirms the need to justify every interpretation. They point out that this view can be challenged: "it might be maintained that our beliefs about what others in our community mean by their words and actions are justified by default: unless circumstances depart from the norm, in some way that we should notice, the beliefs we have automatically are justified without appeal to anything" (Lepore and Ludwig 2005, p. 271, fn. 220) In this contrary conception, only sporadically would justifications be called for, and ascriptions would need to "be actively justified only when circumstances depart in certain specific ways from the norm" (Lepore and Ludwig 2005, p. 271). I believe we can form a tighter argument for the general insufficiency of conventions, and one that is not dependent on disputable epistemological stances, by just letting go of the idea of justification.

The revised argument I propose stems from the same crucial observation that there is an ever-present possibility that the "speaker has not used his words in conformity with public norms" (Lepore and Ludwig 2005, p. 270). Sometimes, interpreters detect that this is indeed the case – straightforwardly, this gives us occasional insufficiency. Now, the crucial inferential step towards general insufficiency is supported by the consideration that any occasional detection of non-conventional uses already requires some prior form of attention to that possibility. That is, it cannot be that the detection of deviation triggers deeper interpretation because deeper interpretation is already needed for detecting deviation. The interpreter would not detect any departure from the conventional course if he were not both aware of the possibility of deviant uses and on the lookout for them, however unconsciously and effortlessly. He would simply continue ascribing standard meanings, and suffer, unwittingly, the consequent losses in understanding. This is not what happens – interpreters do detect anomalies and reinterpret in accordance. Furthermore, I must stress that *every* utterance is a chance for deviation. Because of that, interpreters are required to be continuously on the lookout. Virtually never are they allowed to rest exclusively on their knowledge of the community's norms and conventions. What emerges here, I conclude, is the generalized insufficiency of conventions and the correlative need for interpreters to engage in a continuous exercise of rationality and rationalization.

5.2 Arguing against Necessity

Can speakers do without conventions in their linguistic practices? Davidson's examples of malapropisms clearly show that sometimes speakers manage to understand each other by means other than the exploration of meaning conventions.

Once more, the important question that follows is how far can we extend this conclusion? Is this merely an exceptional phenomenon, or is it possible to engage in verbal communication while completely dispensing with the use of conventions?

The examples explored hint at the weaker conclusion. Not only are those non-conventional uses confined to special occurrences and not very widespread in conversation, but they even seem to be possible only when operating against a background of standing linguistic conventions.[9] First, in almost all cases, even if to varying degrees, the figuring out of the intended first meaning seems only possible thanks to the prevalence of standards in the linguistic context of the misused expression, be it simply the rest of the sentence or even more than that, some stretch of the ongoing conversation. How would the interpreter discern *monotony* in "monogamy" were it not for the regular interpretation of "We need a few laughs to break up the ..." (Davidson 1986, p. 90). Besides, there is often also some form of proximity or association either between the expression actually used and the expression standardly used to mean the intended meaning – typically a suggestive sound resemblance as with "epitaphs" and "epithets" – or even between the intended meaning and the meaning standardly associated with the expression employed – as when Davidson conceives the possibility of successfully using "Water!" to mean "Fire!" (Davidson 1986, p. 89).

The examples offered do not support the general non-necessity of conventions, but only a very local form of it. However, in this case – more than with *sufficiency* – Davidson frequently writes in a way that seems indeed to reveal his intention of holding and defending their complete dispensability. Already in 1982 he states his question in the most general terms:

> The question is delicate because it concerns not the truth of the claim that speech is convention-bound, but the importance and role of convention in speech. The issue may be put counterfactually: could there be communication by language without convention?
>
> (Davidson 1982, p. 265)

To this, of course, he answers positively, and still with no hint that he means to confine his conclusions to mere local exceptions:

> In conclusion, then, I want to urge that linguistic communication does not require, though it very often makes use of, rule-governed repetition; and in that case, convention does not

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9 Cf. Camp (2016, pp. 127–128).

> help explain what is basic to linguistic communication, though it may describe a usual, though contingent, feature.
>
> (Davidson 1982, pp. 279–280)[10]

In this section I will consider a line of thought purporting to reach beyond the examples and sustain the stronger claim – that conventions are unnecessary – in its stronger and general form. I'll refer to it as "the argument from radical interpretability".[11] It is a tempting argument in favor of general non-necessity, and one that is arguably discernible in Davidson's work. In any case, I'm convinced that the argument fails, and I'll show why.[12]

Davidson starts by invoking a distinction between ideal conditions and assertions of principle, on the one hand, and matters of fact and practical considerations, on the other. He uses it to characterize the role of conventions and knowledge of conventions in linguistic practices, affirming that, instead of being essential to interpretation and communication, they are merely convenient, frequently employed but ultimately extraneous to the task. He describes knowledge of such conventions as "a practical crutch to interpretation" (Davidson 1982, p. 279), indispensable in practice, "but a crutch which, under optimum conditions for communication, we can in the end throw away, and could in theory have done without from the start" (Davidson 1982, p. 279).

The first obstacle emerges here. I find the applicability of the distinction to the discussion at hand much less clear than it might appear at first. Practical considerations are of the essence when the question is precisely what is necessary for two limited creatures to reach verbal understanding. The finite nature of the participants is of central importance here, not an accessory problem. There might

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10 We find the same tone in the other papers on the topic. See, for instance, Davidson (1994, p. 119).

11 Various authors have identified versions of this argument, for instance, Lepore and Ludwig (2005, p. 277 ff.), Bar-On (2016, p. 57), Camp (2016, p. 121).

12 I wish to stress that I'm here committing solely to the investigation of *one* particular line of thought in defense of the strong dispensability thesis, the one that I found most prominent and promising. I'm not offering an exhaustive inspection of all available or tried arguments, nor am I claiming a final verdict on this question. Other arguments have been sketched over the years. I distinguish one in particular that was invoked by one of the reviewers; we might describe it as *the argument from indeterminacy of interpretation.* This argument made some important appearances in a number of texts from the late eighties and early nineties. It was (in some way) suggested by Ramberg (1989), closely inspected and criticized by Bar-On and Risjord (1992), and again rejected, on different grounds, by Pietroski (1994). Perhaps more could still be said about or extracted from this argument. I don't find it promising. In particular, I'm convinced by the reasons uncovered both by Bar-On and Risjord and by Pietroski that recommend its abandonment.

be some room to negotiate which constraints to reckon and which to leave aside, what is really indispensable and what is simply hard to do without, but any particular conclusion would require detailed discussion and justification, not just a vague reference to "optimum conditions". What would be *optimum*? To have a lot of time and resources? To be a very smart and lucky interpreter? Surely omniscience and telepathy are out of the question.

Ultimately, I will conclude that Davidson doesn't manage to put forward any realistic setting or context in which meaning conventions could fairly be described as mere *practical crutches,* where speakers could plausibly reach verbal communication without relying on extensive knowledge of regularities in each others' use of language. I will argue that the prime candidate for such a setting, the fundamental situation of radical interpretation (Davidson 1973), reveals itself not as *convention free* but rather as the very enactment of a process of initiation of the interpreter into a series of conventions of language that he will end up sharing with the speaker.

Davidson originally introduced the idea of radical interpretation as the task or process of interpretation from scratch, that is, from a position of total ignorance of the speaker's language, which makes no use of dictionaries, bilingual intermediaries, or any other shortcut into the relevant meaning conventions and standards. He sketched a method for simultaneously breaking into the speaker's meanings and thoughts, starting only from her observable behavior: her moves, sounds and interactions with the environment and with other agents. In this, the interpreter is guided by a single principle, the Principle of Charity, that, at its most general, simply demands that the thoughts and meanings arrived at be such as to reveal the speaker as a rational being.

Famously, reflection on this idealized interpretative situation has a very fundamental place in Davidson's philosophy. References to it are also present in Davidson's thoughts on conventions, especially in "Communication and Convention". There he justifies the practical convenience of meaning conventions simply with our not having "the time, patience, or opportunity to evolve a new theory of interpretation for each speaker" (Davidson 1982, p. 278),[13] and implies that falling for a conventionalist model of linguistic communication requires having "[t]he fact that radical interpretation is so commonplace... hidden from us" (Davidson 1982, p. 279). However, here, Davidson is not necessarily referring to the fundamental setting described above. Plausibly, in this context he means not interpretation from scratch but simply interpretation starting from some position of less than perfect prior knowledge of the speaker's language. The crucial similarity is

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13 This point resurfaces in Davidson (1994, p. 118).

the general form of both investigations, the fact that, at whatever the stage, each interpretative move responds ultimately only to the Principle of Charity. We are here talking (flagrantly) about the same type of exercise in rationality and rationalization that was introduced in Section 4 above.

Can radical interpretation be used to create convention-free linguistic communication? Or, in other words: Would the radical interpretability of meanings prove the general non-necessity hypothesis? The answer is negative in both senses of the enterprise.

Let us start with radical interpretation in the *mitigated* sense. Here, the negative answer follows almost immediately. In these cases we are assuming that some knowledge of the language is in place and is being relied upon to inquire into what is not already known. This form of possession and employment of shared knowledge effectively amounts to participation in meaning conventions. What we have here is the kind of examples inspected at the start of this section. There we stressed the obvious, that is, how each of these particular instances depended on a background of standing linguistic conventions.

The second scenario seems much more promising. In the fundamental setting, the radical interpreter starts from a position of total ignorance of all conventions. In this, of course, they are not unlike each of us, speakers, born unlearned. Should we not be allowed to conclude that conventions are generally unnecessary from the eventual success of the radical interpreter? The answer is no. The flaw in the inference is that it misses the fact that the process of arriving at such an understanding consists precisely in the learning or establishing of linguistic conventions.

Lepore and Ludwig come close this point when they explain that the fact that "field linguists can break into alien languages" (Lepore and Ludwig 2005, pp. 279–280) does not prove non-necessity because "they do so by figuring out the regularities in the uses of words by their subjects, which is a matter of learning which conventions govern their words in their linguistic community" (Lepore and Ludwig 2005, pp. 279–280). But there's more to it than this. The problem is not that, as a matter of fact, field linguists and children learn languages by learning conventional uses already established in the relevant communities. Radical interpretation could conceivably bring interlocutors to coordinate on a radically new language without any ties to prior conventions. The problem is that even those forged, new uses would be no less conventional, in the relevant Lewisian sense. Let us see, in more detail, how.

In the early beginnings of interpretation there is no alternative but for the speaker to use her words in a regular way.[14] "The best the speaker can do is to be interpretable, that is, to use a finite supply of distinguishable sounds applied consistently to objects and situations he believes are apparent to his hearer" (Davidson 1984, p. 13). As for the interpreter, he as well must build and test his interpretative hypotheses upon the assumption that the speaker is conducting herself in precisely that way. Let us simplify the community to include only the speaker and the interpreter – it makes no difference to my argument if interpreter and speaker are establishing new conventions of their own or simply seeking to coordinate on an already established and more widely shared practice. Take a very rudimentary example, for instance, the regularity *R of* using "There is a rabbit" to mean *there is a rabbit* – that is, the regularity of uttering "There is a rabbit" to mean *there is a rabbit*, and of taking someone else's utterance of "There is a rabbit" to mean *there is a rabbit*. First, only the speaker is conforming to *R*, while the interpreter is assuming that there is some regularity but is still trying to figure out what. He muses that it will have something to do with rabbits, or maybe animals, or maybe game or meat. Only new observations can confirm with reasonable certainty that the right meaning is *there's a rabbit*, and, by then, conformity to *R* will already be common to interpreter and speaker. Even if the interpreter, for some reason, were not himself uttering the learned expression, he would still be conforming to *R* just by taking the speaker's utterances to mean the relevant meaning.

Furthermore, all this already gets us more than simple shared conformity. Regularity and repetition are vital in this process. But once we grant that regularity on the part of the speaker and the correspondent knowledge on the part of the interpreter must be in place, it is relatively easy to see that the remaining conditions for there to be a convention, in the Lewisian sense, are also satisfied.

Let us first consider *common knowledge*. The transition into competence with some linguistic expression will likely be a very diffuse event. However, from the

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14 Kathrin Glüer acknowledges that "a speaker who does not use his words with a certain regularity would not seem to be radically interpretable" (Glüer 2011, p. 110; 2013, p. 353), but still finds no "deep tension" between Davidson's views on radical interpretation and his anti-conventionalism. A reconciliation plan is suggested when she describes radical interpretation as a "limiting case" (ibid.). This argument fails, at least in the present context. An appeal to the exceptional character of this interpretative situation cannot help here because we started, precisely, by establishing that non-radical interpretation cases fared no better in rendering plausible general non-necessity. It must be said, however, that this is not meant as a direct challenge to Glüer's position, because it is not clear whether she takes something as strong as *general* non-necessity to be at stake in this discussion.

moment where there is solid enough understanding for some expression, we can be confident that interpreter and speaker will be sharing not only conformity to the relevant regularity but also common knowledge that they do. To begin with, each must know of his or her own case that he or she is conforming to R. Next, by now we can also be sure that the interpreter knows of the regularity on the speaker's part. It is only because he managed to figure that out that he himself is conforming to *R*.

There follows a slightly more challenging question: why must it be the case that the speaker reciprocates the attention? One way to defend this is to invoke Davidson's criterion for communicative success – that the speaker must manage to get her words to be understood as she *intends* them to be understood. When pressed with the *Humpty Dumpty objection* (Davidson, 1986, pp. 97–98), Davidson explains that he's not advocating the whimsical and unsuccessful style of linguistic innovation attempted by Carroll's character. A genuine intention, Davidson insists, requires a reasonable expectation of realization; therefore, a "speaker cannot … intend to mean something by what he says unless he believes his audience will interpret his words as he intends" (Davidson 1986, p. 97). This translates to our present context; our *radical* speaker is no less required to possess a reasonable belief that her words will be understood as she intends. That is, the speaker's knowledge that the interpreter is himself conforming to *R* is also a necessary condition for verbal communication in Davidson's model. Without it there simply is no interpretation, and hence no radical interpretation.

Once this minimal basis of common knowledge has been reached – and taking into account that interlocutors are rational agents genuinely interested in communication and mutual understanding, and that all the *investigation* takes place *in the open* – the following layers of the conceptual spiral become likewise accessible. Each interlocutor will then be in a condition to infer that each interlocutor knows that both are conforming to R, and that each interlocutor knows that each interlocutor knows that both are conforming to R, and so on, indefinitely.

In the discussion of common knowledge, we already touched on a further article of Lewis' analysis, namely the condition that it is the belief that others conform to R that provides everyone a good and decisive reason to conform to it. We have already noted that this is how it is with the interpreter: to figure out the regularities in the speaker's linguistic conduct so as to be able to ascribe her meanings in accordance is the proper goal of his interpretive effort. The same must also be true of the speaker. We can infer it as the best explanation for her regular conduct. It is only because she expects that her regularity will allow the interpreter, sooner or later, to interpret adequately her words that she holds on

to her consistent practice. That is, it is only because she hopes and aims for the interpreter's conformity to *R* that she herself conforms to it.

The two final conditions are also fulfilled. First, once interpreter and speaker have started, there comes into place a general preference for general conformity to *R*. Second, it is also the case that there are alternatives to R that would be just as viable, as attested by the great variety of ways, in different languages, of meaning *there is a rabbit*.

All Lewisian conditions are fulfilled. I conclude, as anticipated, that radical interpretability implies no general dispensability of conventions for linguistic communication. Instead of the promised convention-free alternative, radical interpretation would constitute the very bringing about of conventional solutions to their communicative problems.

Lepore and Ludwig try a slightly different approach. They avail themselves of a distinction evocative of the one Davidson appeals to between matters of principle and matters of fact. Ultimately they reject radical interpretability but they maintain that it would actually imply *in principle* general[15] dispensability of conventions, even if we, common agents, do not, and could not, proceed this way due to our contingent limitations. Here is how they do it. They start by affirming that to ask "whether it is in principle possible to interpret another without appeal to prior knowledge of conventions" (Lepore and Ludwig 2005, p. 278) is tantamount to asking "is there knowledge an interpreter could in principle have, leaving aside natural limitations of knowledge and perspicacity, which would enable him to correctly interpret a speaker of whom he had no prior knowledge at some given time?" (Lepore and Ludwig 2005, p. 278). This latter they find "equivalent to asking whether there are facts independent of linguistic conventions that determine what a speaker means by his words" (Lepore and Ludwig 2005, p. 279). Thus they conclude that "if Davidson's basic methodological stance on matters of meaning is correct" (Lepore and Ludwig 2005, p. 279) – that is, if speakers are radically interpretable – "then the answer is clearly affirmative" (Lepore and Ludwig 2005, p. 279).

I follow the first part of the argument. To affirm the radical interpretability of the speaker is to affirm the existence of meaning-determining facts that are accessible to interpreters with no prior knowledge of the language or of its conventions. My doubts concern what comes next. Would these facts be really "independent of linguistic conventions" (Lepore and Ludwig 2005, p. 279)? There is a sense in which they would indeed be independent: they *are accessible* to people

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15 They do not pause at the general versus local distinction for non-necessity – see Lepore and Ludwig (2005, p. 269) – but it is clear, in context, that they are thinking about the general.

outside those conventions and ignorant of the relevant knowledge. However, if I'm right, there is second a sense, and a crucial one, in which they would not: these facts would *not be the case* were it not for standing or emergent linguistic conventions.

Lepore and Ludwig seem to acknowledge only the speaker's role in meaning determination, and they simply start with the assumption that the relevant meaning-determining facts are there, publicly available in the world, waiting to be discovered. The whole question, then, becomes whether or not the interpreter is able to collect them, to which the *in principle* qualification allows a positive answer. In other words, they subtract the limited human interpreter from Davidson's picture and assume that the all the relevant facts would remain in place.

However, meaning-determining facts don't happen for no reason.[16] In particular, speakers exhibit whatever dispositions to verbal behavior they exhibit because they want to make themselves understood to some audience and expect to accomplish that by acting in some particular way. In this section, we found nothing supporting the possibility of holding a reasonable expectation of being verbally understood that did not appeal to meaning conventions: regular uses are conventional, new uses rely on a background of regular uses, radically interpretable uses aim at being conventionalized. Speakers' behaviors will reflect this state of affairs. Without standing conventions, be it in the forefront or in the background, or the prospect of new ones, speakers will simply not find the right opportunity for any linguistic move. Speakers' linguistic behavior, as much as interpreters' inquiry, depends on linguistic conventions.

6 Conclusion

In this paper I have reconsidered the role of convention in linguistic communication within Davidson's framework. Occasional examples of convention-free successful verbal exchanges are frequent enough, but the intuitive reaction is to take them as mere exceptions of limited consequence for the general understanding of linguistic communication. I followed two arguments purporting to show that the split is in fact more robust. I concluded, in the first case, in favor of the general insufficiency of meaning conventions to secure that interlocutors coordinate on the literal meaning of their utterances. I concluded, in the second case, against the general non-necessity of conventions. Linguistic practice engages speakers

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16 Cf. Verheggen (2016, p. 69).

in a continuous exercise of vigilance and deeper interpretation; at no moment are they permitted to rest exclusively on their stock knowledge of the prevailing linguistic conventions. However, this is not enough to deprive conventions of an indispensable role in the affair. I tried to make clear that instead of competing models, conventions of meaning emerge and strive in essential interdependence with other efforts of rationality and rationalization.

Acknowledgements

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