

行政院國家科學委員會補助專題研究計畫成果報告

A Pragmatic Conception of Truth and Semantic Paradoxes

語用的真之概念與語意詭論

計畫類別：個別型計畫

計畫編號：NSC 90 - 2411 - H - 002 -056

執行期間：2001年8月1日 至 2002年7月31日

計畫主持人：楊金穆

執行單位：台灣大學哲學系

2002年 10月 31日

NSC Project Report No. 90-2411-H-002-056
08/01/2001~07/31/2002
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October 31, 2002

A Pragmatic Conception of truth and Semantic Paradoxes*

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Keywords: Semantic paradoxes, the liar paradox, the truth-predicate, Davidson, revision theory of truth, radical interpretation

Abstract

The main objective of this research is to propose a pragmatic conception of truth and show how the alleged semantic paradoxes could be dealt with on the basis of a satisfactory pragmatic conception of truth. As I (Yang 2000) have argued, if we give up the semantic conception of truth and hold a pragmatic conception of truth instead, then the truth predicate is applicable to sentences without deflating its meaningfulness. As a matter of fact, a survey of the semantic paradoxes and two main approaches, i.e. the hierarchy argument and the truth-value gap argument illustrates that the failure of both approaches has its root in common in that both take a semantic conception of truth. For on the traditional semantic conception of truth, the truth predicate is applicable to any sentence without any restriction. And it is the reiteration of the truth predicate in some cases, especially self-reference, which gives rise to the well-known Liar Paradoxes. However, I shall argue that on the proposed pragmatic conception of truth, the reiteration of the truth predicate applied to self-reference sentences can be reinterpreted. The notorious semantic paradoxes can be thus dealt with. But exactly what kind of a pragmatic conception of truth is appropriate? I shall propose that a modification of Davidson's program for a theory of meaning based on the conception of radical interpretation would do the job.

* A full version of this report was presented at a conference on Davidson's philosophy, September 19-20, 2002, held at National Tsing Hua University, Shin-Chui, Taiwan. I am especially indebted to Professor Davidson for his comments and encouragement. A refined version is in preparation.

I start with a brief description of Davidson's program for a theory of meaning (as it is to be characterized in a series of papers in (Davidson 1984)), and that of his picture of the concept of truth (as it stands in a series of recent papers, (Davidson 1991, 1996, 1997, 1999)). I next sketch the problems with liar paradox and its possible diagnoses. (Parsons (1974), Burge (1979), Chihara (1979), Kripke (1975), Martin (1984)) In particular, I focus on a satisfactory account of the truth-predicate. I then further argue that Gupta's (Gupta (1993), (2001)) revision theory of truth provides a promising account by appealing to the so-called revision rule. But Gupta has to admit a circular concept of truth, which may weaken the force of his theory. It strikes me that if we adopt Davidson's doctrine of radical interpretation, in the sense that an interpreter may gain so-called interpreted truth conditions when the interpreter knows what the speaker means by uttering a sentence, then it can be shown that in a sort of sense, Davidson's radical interpretation behaves just like Gupta's revision rule, and the notion of interpreted truth conditions may pave a way to a satisfactory account of the truth-predicate involved in the liar paradox. Of course, the notion of interpreted truth condition may threaten the objectivity of the concept of truth. And I shall briefly remark that Davidson has good treatment with regard to the requirement of the objective concept of truth.

中文摘要

本研究目的在於提出語用的真之概念，並基於此概念處理語意詭論。我已說明(Yang 2000)，如果放棄語意的真之概念，而以語用的真之概念代之，作為述詞的「真」便能在仍保有其意義性之下而應用到語句上。事實上，對語意詭論以及兩種進路的探究，即階層論證與真值溝隙論證，皆說明兩種進路的失敗乃根植於採取語意的真之概念。因為傳統上的語意真之概念是將述詞「真」應用到任何語句而無限制。而就是因為在某些情況下重複使用述詞「真」，尤其是自我指涉的情況，而產生了有名的說謊詭論。然而，我將指出，基於語用的真之概念，自我指涉語句對真之概念的重複使用可重獲詮釋。如此惡名昭彰的語意詭論得以解決。但什麼樣的語用概念是適當的？我認為戴維森基於徹底詮釋的意義理論能勝任此角色。

我首先簡短描述戴維森的意義理論，並真之概念。進而說明說謊詭論的問題及可能的處理方式。特別是，我將聚焦在真之述詞的說明。其次，我將指出，古普他的真之理論訴諸其修正後的規則，能提供這方面的說明。但他必須承認真之概念是個循環的概念，以致弱化了理論的強度。這使我想，如果我們採取戴維森的徹底詮釋，也就是，當詮釋者知道說話者所意指，詮釋者得到的就是所謂的詮釋後的真之條件，那麼，在某種意義

上，戴維森的徹底詮釋所扮演的角色就像是古普他的修正規則，而詮釋後的真之條件便能說明說謊論證中的真之述詞。當然，詮釋後的真之條件此概念會威脅真之概念的客觀性，而我將說明戴維森亦有了好的處理。

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