

## DAVIDSON AND THE CORRESPONDENCE THEORY OF TRUTH

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**Abstract** Donald Davidson, in his works on theories of meaning, looks for a compositionism in which single words do not correspond to single meanings: parts of sentences do not have proper meanings, they only give a systematic contribution to the sentences in which they occur. This is a holistic conception of meaning, where the meaning of the sentences depends on their structure, and the meaning of each element of the structure is only an abstraction from the totality of sentences in which it occurs. It is possible to indicate the meaning of a sentence, or of a word, only indicating the meaning of all sentences of the language. In *True to the Facts* (1969), Davidson studies the correspondentist conceptions of truth. The correspondence theories are founded on a simple and ineluctable idea, they are true but banal and useless. The American philosopher claims he is defending a kind of theory of correspondence: the truth can be explained through reference to a relationship between language and the world; however it is clear that the correspondence that Davidson accepts is not the classical form of correspondence theory. Indeed, using the slingshot argument he refuses the classical strategy of facts and the semantic atomism.

*Keywords:* Meaning, Truth, Correspondence theory of truth, Natural language, Holism, Model Theory.

### 1. Introduction

In *Truth and Meaning* (1967) Davidson does connect the criticism against the strategy of facts to the criticism against Frege's compositionism. A Fregean theory of meaning analyzes the sentence "Teaethetus flies" saying that: given the meaning of "Teaethetus" as the argument of a function  $f$ , the meaning of the concept "flies" generates the meaning of "Teaethetus flies" as the value of the function  $f$ . In this compositionism the meanings of words are conceived as entities and, according to Davidson, this is a useless way to conceive compositionism. Davidson looks for a compositionism where single words do not correspond to single meanings: parts of sentences do not have proper meanings, they only give a systematic contribution to the sentences in which they occur. This is a holistic conception of meaning, where the meaning of the sentences depend on their structure, and the meaning of each element of the structure is only an abstraction from the totality of sentences in which it occurs. It is possible to indicate the meaning of a sentence, or of a word, only indicating the meaning of all sentences of the language. This kind of holistic theory entails all the sentences of the form " $e$  means  $m$ ". As we know, Davidson erases the intensional and enigmatic expression "means" or "means that" and substitutes it with the predicate of truth. Therefore, he proposes to employ the Tarskian biconditionals, and the sufficient restrictions to the predicate of truth, to build an adequate theory of meaning, which does not depend on other semantic concepts like that of "meaning". Davidson claims that if the metalanguage is rich enough, the theory of meaning we are considering can take the form of the explicit definition of the predicate "is  $T$ ". The compositionist conclusion is that: "a theory of meaning for a language  $L$  shows how the meanings of the sentences depend on the meanings of the words, if it contains a recursive definition of truth in  $L$ ". In these few simple steps we find the origin of Davidson's program: the foundation of an adequate theory of meaning on the semantic concept of truth. In Wittgenstein's style, indicating the truth conditions of a sentence is a way to indicate the meaning of that sentence. It is important not to forget that he also refers to Tarski's problem of clarifying the ordinary use of the words "truth" and "true". Thus, Davidson's semantic theory does not use the "meanings" of the words or of the sentences, in the Fregean compositionist sense. The theory does reveal nothing more than the truth

conditions of a sentence with respect to the same sentence with quotation marks, which is on the left side of the biconditional. The task of the theory is to confront the truth conditions of each sentence with those features of the sentence (the words) which can have the same functions in other sentences. According to Davidson, *the semantic position of the sentence, in the complex of the entire language, is much more important than the correspondence of the sentence with an atomic fact* (coherentism).

In *True to the Facts* (1969), Davidson studies the correspondence conceptions of truth. The correspondence theories are founded on a simple and ineluctable idea, they are true but useless. Davidson quotes Strawson's opinion (1950): the theory of correspondence should not be purified but erased. Davidson questions the possibility of learning something about the truth by deleting or substituting the predicate "is true" in the assertions. The sentences

- (A) The Pythagora's theorem is true
- (B) Nothing of what Aristotle said is true

can be substituted by

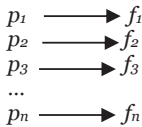
- (A')  $(p)$  (the sentence that  $p =$  the Pythagora's theorem  $\rightarrow p$ )
- (B')  $\sim (\exists p)$ (Aristotle said that  $p \cdot p$ )

In this way the quantification substitutes the predicate of truth. Through the principle ' $(p)$  (the sentence that  $p$  is true  $\leftrightarrow p$ )' it may be possible to erase the predicate of truth: in this way, Davidson claims, it is possible to understand the function of the truth in the sentences. Ramsey (1927) adopted a different strategy: in ordinary language these quantificational substitutions are not possible and it is necessary, in (A') and (B'), to add the predicate "is true". Davidson thinks that the extra-linguistic aims of the sentences are logically independent from their literal meaning, and he is interested only in the literal meaning. In the ordinary language the predication of truth is used to express assent, to emphasize the conviction or the authority, to avoid repetitions to receive confirmation and so on; according to Davidson, his method of elimination of truth would reinforce this opinion. The only synonym expression of the predicate "is true", which can be employed in a theory, is "corresponding to the facts". However, Davidson's conclusion is that the predication of truth is hard to eliminate in natural language. Surprisingly, the American philosopher claims he is defending a kind of theory of correspondence: the truth can be explained through reference to a relationship between the language and the world. But it is suddenly clear that the correspondence that Davidson accepts is not the classical form of correspondence (between atomic propositions and atomic facts). Indeed, using the slingshot argument he refuses the classical strategy of facts. Consider the sentence "The sentence that  $p$  corresponds to the fact that  $q$ ". When is this sentence true? When " $p$ " and " $q$ " are substituted by the same sentence, but not only in this case. The sentence that Napoli is farther north than Red Bluff corresponds to the fact that Napoli is farther north than Red Bluff, but also to the fact that Red Bluff is farther south than Napoli; and also to the fact that Red Bluff is farther south than the biggest Italian town within thirty miles of Ischia. Davidson affirms, furthermore, that Napoli satisfies this description: "it is the biggest Italian town within thirty miles of Ischia and such that London is in England". In this way it is possible to understand why if a sentence corresponds to a fact then it corresponds to all facts; as proof of these hypotheses, Davidson (1969: 756) proposes a form of slingshot argument almost identical to that of *Truth and Meaning* (1967). All true sentences describe the same thing: the Great Fact. The relation of correspondence is a relation between any true sentence and the Great Fact and it is impossible to distinguish between the predicate "corresponds to the Great Fact" and "is true".

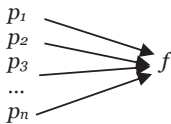
2. Strategy of facts and satisfaction

With regard to the slingshot argument, Davidson claims that it is possible to refuse the principles of proof and to build a fact theory which avoids the ontological collapse, but in this case there is another serious difficulty. Let us accept the Fregean distinction between meaning and reference. If we try to distinguish the facts at intensional level and not at extensional level, we would only have sentences to differentiate the facts. In this case, we would distinguish facts with the same refinement of sentences. However, it is impossible to explain the true sentences affirming that they correspond to facts which are linguistically described, because it is a circular explanation. As Russell (1918) and Davidson (1969) point out, a useful theory of facts should refuse these two poles: every true sentence stands for a distinct fact (a) and all true sentences stand for the same fact (b). In the first case facts are not useful in the explanation of truth because they are characterized in terms of true sentences (Cf. Strawson, 1950), in the second case the theory would suffer from Frege's *equiestensionality*. If  $p$  is any true sentence,  $f$  is any fact and  $n = \infty$ , the best conception of correspondence between true sentences and facts is c):

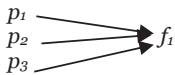
a) One to one: each single  $p$  corresponds to each single  $f$



b) All to one:  $\forall p$  corresponds to the unique  $f$



c) Many to one:  $\exists p$  corresponds to the same  $f_i$



Davidson argues that there is an alternative solution to the strategy of facts of c): it is suggested by Tarski in his work on the concept of truth in formalized languages (1933). The truth of sentences must be defined through the concept of "satisfaction". The sentences are entities which are satisfied, while the entities which satisfy sentences are functions which apply the variables of the object-language on the entities on which they vary. A function satisfies an  $n$ -place predicate, with variables in its places, if the predicate is true of those entities which the function assigns to those variables (Davidson's example is: a function  $f$  satisfies "x loves y" only if the entity given by  $f$  to  $x$  loves the entity given by  $f$  to  $y$ ). It is clear that the relation of satisfaction is still a correspondence relation, but reversed with respect to the truth.

Truth as correspondence:

"John loves Mary" corresponds to the fact  $\longrightarrow$   $\{ \langle John, \langle loves, Mary \rangle \rangle \}$   
 (is true iff)

Satisfaction:

$f$  gives the right entities to variables  $x$  and  $y$  — satisfy the sentence  $\longrightarrow$  " $xLy$ "  
 and to the binary predicate  $L$

The relation of satisfaction follows the usual truth tables and rules to treat connectives and quantification. Given that the satisfaction is, in a certain sense, a “reversed truth”, Davidson claims that the semantic conception of truth suggested by Tarski merits the name of correspondence theory. Davidson shows the logical advantages of the satisfaction with respect to the strategy of facts: the strategy of satisfaction can be applied to open sentences (those with free variables) and to closed sentences, while the facts can be the references (*Bedeutungen*) only of closed sentences. For sentences of ordinary language, the satisfaction can be realized through successions of commonplace objects. The sentence “Dolores loves Dagmar” would be satisfied by the succession: Dolores, Dagmar, if Dolores loves Dagmar. The sentence “*e* is satisfied by all the functions” does not have the same meaning as “*e* corresponds to the facts”. These two sentences have this in common: both express a relationship between language and the world, both are identical to “*e* is true”. A comparison between the correspondence theories which employ the concept of satisfaction and the correspondence theories based upon facts is clearer if we accept “Frege’s argument” (the Slingshot Argument) on the extension of sentences. True sentences cannot be distinguished by what they refer to (the Great Fact) or by what satisfies them (all the functions, all the successions). This is not a problem for Tarski’s theory because the satisfaction of closed sentences is explained on the basis of the satisfaction of closed and open sentences. Instead, in the theories which employ the strategy of facts, only closed sentences have corresponding facts. In Davidson’s conception, the truth is reached through different ways, because different assignations of entities to variables satisfy different open sentences and because the closed sentences are built upon open sentences. All the true sentences go in the same place (the Great Fact) but there are “different ways” to reach this place. Davidson’s virtual theory describes this itinerary for a sentence, showing the steps of the recursive *iter* of satisfaction adequate for the sentence. The description is the demonstration of a theorem which has the form of a T-sentence. Davidson maintains that the correspondence theories based upon the strategy of facts failed above all for one reason: *the desire to include, into the entity which corresponds to the true sentence, not only the objects named in the sentence, but also what the sentence tells about them*. In this way it is almost impossible to describe the fact that makes a sentence true without the use of the same sentence. On the contrary, a correspondence theory based upon satisfaction has less pretences about what to put in the entities that correspond to the sentences: these entities are only an arbitrary coupling between the objects on which the variables vary and the variables. The simplicity of objects is balanced by the difficulty of the explanation of the relation between objects and sentences: in the description of satisfaction it is necessary to include each feature of the sentence which is important for the truth. Thus, in order to explain the truth through satisfaction, all the conceptual devices of the language are to be exploited.

In this way, Davidson (1969) divides the destiny of correspondence theory from that of the strategy of facts: he accepts the idea that truth is a relation between language and the world, but refuses the theoretical function of the facts. Therefore, Davidson selects a theory derived from Tarski’s correspondence theory, which he considers very far from the classical concept of correspondence. Between sixties and seventies Davidson believes, *contra* Strawson (1950), that the correspondence theory merits elaboration and not elimination.

### 3. Truth as intra-linguistic predicate

In the essay *In Defense of Convention T* (1973a), Davidson quotes an important principle expressed by Tarski in *The Semantic Conception of Truth* (1944: 345). While the words “designs” “satisfies” and “refers” express semantic relations, the word “true” has a different logical nature. It expresses a property (or denotes a class) of particular expressions: the sentences. According to Davidson it is essential, in Tarski’s theory, that

the predicate of truth does not express a semantic relation. If the truth expressed a semantic relation, the fundamental disappearance of all semantic concepts, in the left side of biconditional (T-sentence), would not be possible. The T-convention has the advantage of substituting an important but obscure problem with a clear task. The problem is: what does it mean for a sentence to be true? Because of a misunderstanding, the problem has been expressed in this way: what makes a sentence true? The serious problem arises when this question suggests that the truth must be conceived as a relation between a sentence and an entity like a fact or a state of affairs. The form of the T-sentences shows that a theory can characterize the *property* of truth without reference to the entities to which the sentences, which have this property, correspond differentially. Also the absolute theories of truth are, in some way, correspondentist, but their true sentences are satisfied by successions of objects. That is different from the correspondence between sentences and facts. A recursive theory of truth that employs the T-convention does not solve obscure problems like "what does it mean for a sentence to be true?", but it solves an important and clear problem: "how the meaning of a sentence depends upon its parts?". Given that there is an infinite number of T-sentences, the theory will select a finite number of expressions and a finite number of syntactic structures relevant for the truth: these devices will be after used to compose all the sentences. This kind of compositionality refuses the building block semantics: it does not entail that the meaning is opposed to the reference or that the meanings are entities. The Davidsonian concept of truth is also a means of facing a difficult problem. The aim of building a theory of truth for the natural language, in the natural language, is, according to Tarski, unattainable. However, we can eliminate the predicate of truth and that of satisfaction from the object-language, and put them in the metalanguage, so this is the only difference that we can theorize between these two languages. It is now clearer why it is important not to "overanalyze" the concept of truth. To give an explicit definition of truth can only increase the difference between the wealth of metalanguage and that of object-language. On the contrary, the aim of a theory of truth for the natural language is to improve the resources of the object-language and to maintain those of the metalanguage as similar as possible to those of the object-language. In this way, the impossibility of obtaining a scientific treatment of truth theorized by Tarski is overcome. This is another advantage of conceiving the truth as the basis of meaning of the sentences, a basis which is not to explain or to define. If interpreting a sentence entails understanding its meaning, the concept of interpretation is another important point of view for a theory of meaning. In *Radical Interpretation* (1973b), Davidson asks in what sense the theory can furnish an interpretation of a sentence. In a Fregean analysis the theory could produce a function  $y = f(x)$  in which the sentences are the arguments and the interpretations are the values. In this way, the problem would only be displaced: the interpretations would turn out to be mysterious entities, like the meanings of the building block semantics. Instead, it is necessary to eliminate, in the explanation, semantic concepts like "meaning", "interpretation", "synonymy" and so on. Who knows the theory is able to interpret the sentences. Davidson conceives the theory of interpretation as a method of translation from one language to another. Even the interpretation is possible to show the compositional nature of sentences: the interpretation of complex sentences depends systematically on the interpretation of the simple sentences. A theory of truth for a natural language is conceived by Davidson in the following way. A large and meaningful fragment of natural language, with two semantic predicates (satisfaction and reference), is used to formulate a theory of truth for the same fragment. It is necessary to give the sentences the form of standard quantification and to furnish the concept of satisfaction. However, it is certain that each T-sentence expresses the truth conditions of the sentence by employing resources of the same wealth of the sentence. It happens when the sentence does not refer to possible worlds, intensional entities, properties or propositions, or when the formulation of the truth conditions refers to these entities. Following the T-convention, we can consider a theory of truth adequate if it generates a T-sentence for each sentence

of the object–language. To show that the theory is empirically correct it is necessary to check that all the T–sentences are true. The empirical check can only be done on the basis of the behaviour and of the attitudes of the speakers with respect to sentences. In Tarski’s work the T–sentences are considered true because the right side of the biconditional is a simple translation of the sentences of the object–language. Presupposing the translation, Tarski was able to define the truth. Davidson, on the contrary, wants to explain the translation and the interpretation presupposing the truth: the truth is taken as an absolute basis and thanks to the truth it is possible to explain the translation and the interpretation. The advantage is clear: while each sentence has its proper interpretation, the truth is a simple property that can be applied to a sentence or not. The T–sentences must not be considered one by one, because the axioms, i.e. a sufficient number of them, can produce interpretations. The evidence on which to check the truth of the T–sentences are the attitudes of the speakers with respect to the sentences. For the comprehension of the meaning, Davidson considers the belief as the fundamental attitude of the speakers with respect to their sentences. “Believing” means, according to Davidson, “considering (a sentence) true”. There are other attitudes with respect to the sentences: wishing that a sentence be true, commanding that a sentence come true, asking whether a sentence is true, and so on. The beliefs of speakers and the other attitudes can be evidenced by the behaviour of the speakers. The evidence, at the beginning, is only this: the speakers of a language consider different sentences true, in some moments and circumstances, and show these beliefs in their behaviour. On this basis the truth conditions are assigned to the sentences that we want to interpret, truth conditions such that the speakers are considered to be right and sensible, when it is possible and for the “charity principle”. Therefore, if we only know the truth conditions of the sentences, and if the theory is adequate, we can obtain an interpretation of each sentence. Davidson repeats: the truth conditions of a sentence, the right side of the T–sentence, is not an entity or a fact (as singular and structured entity); the truth conditions are given by the right side of the T–sentence, but it is not the single T–sentence which permits the interpretation: it is the *demonstration* of the T–sentence which permits the interpretation. The demonstration of a T–sentence is built with a succession of biconditionals, and the criterion is always holistic. It is possible to interpret a single sentence if a theory of truth of the language to interpret is known. In this case, not only the single T–sentence to interpret would be understood, but also *all* the T–sentences which regard *all* the sentences of the language and *all* the demonstrations. In this case, we could see the right side of the sentence to interpret in the context of the entire language, we could understand the role of each meaningful part of the sentence and the logical connections between this sentence and the others.

Davidson accepts Quine’s thesis of the inscrutability of reference, and this is another important point to understand Davidson’s rejection of facts. If there is not an objective criterion to connect the extensions to singular terms and to predicates, it will be impossible to think that a fact, which is a structured connection of objects, can be the reference of a true sentence, on the basis of the references of the parts of that sentence. In traditional correspondentism, from Plato and Aristotle to Frege and to Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*, the reference of single words was not inscrutable and relative: a sentence is true of a fact because it is composed by the names correctly referred to the objects which compose the fact, and the sentence connects the subject and the predicate correctly with respect to reality. In Frege’s view the truth of a sentence is the result of the composition of its parts, according to the scheme  $y = f(x)$ , in which the truth value  $y$  is the result of the connection of a singular term  $x$  with a predicate  $f(\dots)$ . The truth of a sentence, in this traditional conception, is something composed and derived from the correspondence: a sentence is true if it is in correspondence with the real fact (cf. Field, 1974). With respect to traditional correspondentism, in Davidson’s theory the order is reversed. In *Reality Without Reference* (1977), the theses proposed by Davidson on natural language ontology are clear. On the basis of all the true sentences (i.e. on the basis of the entire language),

we can fix a particular frame of reference *relative* to a language. Only on this basis it is possible to assign references to names and predicates. The truth of various sentences is not built on the basis of the correct reference of the parts of the sentence, because, for the inscrutability, there is not a criterion to define a correct and absolute reference. The basis of the relative reference is the truth, and the truth of sentences is something intuitive and simple: it is directly connected to the truth conditions, which are all the facts of the world. The truth is not a predicate that regards the relation between a singular sentence and a singular fact of the world; the predicate of truth determines a property of a class of sentence, it is an *intra-linguistic* predicate: sentence-to-language and not sentence-to-fact.

#### 4. *First the truth, after the reference*

Often a Tarskian theory of truth is criticized because it does not offer a deep comprehension of the concept of truth, but this critique, in Davidson's opinion, does not cause problems. The T-sentences are clearly true in a pre-analytic sense: they are founded on a primitive and independent comprehension of truth. The Tarski's theory is not interesting because it says what is (in general and from a metaphysical point of view) the truth, but because it shows how the truth value of each sentence of a language *L* depends upon its structure and its constituents (in a different sense with respect to the building block semantics). Scholars like Harman (1974), Field (1972), Parsons (1973) and Putnam (1975) criticize Davidson's theory because it does not explain the relation of reference. But, from the point of view of an absolute theory of truth *à la* Davidson, it is necessary to leave the reference unexplained, because an absolute reference (of names and of predicates) would cause a return to the building block semantics. Davidson calls "ancient and natural" the building block semantics, i.e. a correspondence theory which follows the strategy of facts, and he considers it wrong. According to Davidson, it is important to understand whether the reference is or is not the point of contact between the activity of language and the events and the objects of the world. In accordance with Quine's semantic behaviourism, Davidson claims that only the truth can be treated in a non-linguistic (or extra-linguistic) way, not the reference. Behaviourism has the merit of abandoning the building block semantics and putting the sentence in the focal point of an empirical analysis of language: the only function of the words is their role in sentences, their semantic features are *abstracted* from the semantic features of the sentences where they occur. The unique point where we can connect the language with non-linguistic behaviour is the level of the sentence. Therefore, Davidson does not consider the concept of reference as fundamental for an empirical theory of truth. The abandonment of the reference for the explanation of truth is possible also because a Tarskian theory of truth does not analyze the concept of truth: the extension of the predicate of truth is shown for a language with a fixed primitive dictionary and an infinite number of true sentences. It is possible, in such a theory, to explain the truth of the single sentences on the basis of their structure but not on the semantic feature of the single words.

To understand this particular situation, it is necessary to distinguish between an explanation *inside* the theory and an explanation *of* the theory. Inside the theory, the truth conditions of a sentence are described through the postulated structures and through semantic concepts like satisfaction and reference. On the other hand, in the explanation of the theory in general, the concept of truth, applied to closed sentences, is connected with human activity. Satisfaction and reference are theoretical devices: their function is to formulate, with logical form and logical categories of terms, the truth conditions of sentences. If there is a good way to assign entities to the expressions (a frame of reference), with respect to the truth conditions of sentences, for the inscrutability of reference there will be other infinite different good ways (other conceptual schemes) to assign entities to the same expressions. Thus, Davidson's theory presupposes a general and pre-analytic

concept of truth. Truth is not explained through the T-sentences, but on the basis of truth we can indicate the evidence of a T-sentence. The meaning of a sentence, is given by assigning to this sentence a conceptual place in the lattice of all the sentences of a language: the meaning of an expression is its interpretation. The building block semantics and the theories of facts try to give a very rich content to each sentence on the basis of non-semantic evidence, but they want to profess too much too soon.

The truth conditions of the sentences, in Davidson's theory, could look like (or could be considered as the substitute of) the facts postulated by the building block semantics, but it is necessary to remember the extreme difference between them. In Davidson's conception the truth conditions of a true sentence are not an entity of real world which corresponds to the true sentence, they are described by the right side of the T-sentence and are expressed in the meta-language. They use all the richness of the language, but, being only a translation of the sentence from object-language to meta-language, they remain linguistic expressions holistically bound to all sentences of the language. Thus, Davidson's theory falls into a correspondence conception of type a) (cf. *supra*, Section 2), but in his conception this is not a problem: he considers an infinity of axioms, because the correspondence he uses is knowingly intra-linguistic, at the level of each single sentence. The extra-linguisticity of the correspondence can be reached only at the holistic level: the whole language is in correspondence with the whole world. The fact that the T-sentences have the same sentence on the left and on the right side of the biconditional means that the predicate of truth is not defined, it is unexplained and plays the role of the basis of the theory. The fact theorist looks for a conventional way to describe facts that is not the natural language (As we have seen in Van Fraassen (1969), the "non-linguistic" way employed by fact theorist to describe facts is usually a formalized language, the more expressive and powerful is possible), but, according to Davidson, this is not possible: we only have natural language to speak about the world and we use our perceptions and our actions to be in touch with the facts of the world. The real substitute of the concept of fact, in Davidson's theory, is the function or the succession of objects assigned to the sentences by satisfaction and by reference. The truth conditions are linguistic descriptions of the succession which produces a relation between the single sentence and a part of world in an extra-linguistic sense. However, as we know, the definition of truth is not founded on satisfaction and on reference: reference and satisfaction of sentences instead are founded on a pre-analytic, undefined and primitive conception of truth: differently from Plato (in *Cratylus* and in *Sophist*), Davidson considers the truth of sentences as fundamental and the reference of names and predicates as derived.

## 5. Conclusions

Davidson's contribution to semantic tradition contains important innovations, but also maintains elements of continuity with the past: in 1969 he thought that the correspondence theory was worth being elaborated and not eliminated as Strawson (1950) theorized. In the *Dewey Lectures* of 1989 (Davidson, 1990; 2005) he rejected every form of correspondentism and criticized his own use of the concept of correspondence (cf. *True to the Facts*, 1969). The fact that Davidson, in the past, called himself "a *sui generis* correspondentist" could indicate that it is meaningless, in semantics, to fight the correspondentism. The Davidsonian concept of succession is a substitute of the concept of fact. However, the truth of correspondentism, after the holistic theories of meaning, could be understood, in certain way, as a truism, a useless truth. The obvious result of correspondentism is the explanation of the pre-analytic concept of truth: for a sentence to be true means that it is in correspondence to a fact. In Davidson's theory the concept of truth is instead the fundamental concept: it is possible, but not useful and not meaningful, to ask what the words "true" or "truth" mean. Synonymy entails that all the words and all the sentences of the language can be defined through other words or sentences, this also

holds for the expressions “truth” and “is true”. In Davidson’s theory of meaning, the concept of truth is the device of a semantic axiomatization, the basis of the comprehension; it is not worth considering that “true” means “corresponding”. It is possible to consider that a true sentence corresponds to a fact of the world, but the construction of a coherent theory of facts which employs a formalized language and which is a part of semantics, as Neale (2001) theorizes, is a different matter: this is, according to Davidson, an unsuccessful endeavour from a theoretical-semantic point of view. The correspondence between a true sentence and a fact, as in Aristotle’s theory of proposition, is the natural idea of the speaker: is this sufficient to choose the theory of facts and to refuse the important advantages of holistic theories? It depends on what we want to do with our theory. The answer to this question depends on the practical (or even technological) aims that we want to obtain through our theory.

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