

Conventions and Failure of Communication

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Abstract

D. Davidson argued that shared conventions learned in advance are not essential for the success of communication. In this paper, holding the validity of his contention in suspense, I argue that linguistic conventions play essential roles when communication fails. In everyday communication, when discrepancies are detected between what the speaker intended to inform the hearer and what the hearer actually understood, it becomes necessary to determine whether the speaker or the hearer caused the communication failure. For in everyday communication, the hearer often changes her position based on her misunderstanding about the intention of the speaker, and it is sometimes too late when the hearer realizes the speaker's true intention. In such cases, it is necessary to determine who is responsible for the hearer's loss. The notion of what the speaker said according to the linguistic conventions shared between the speaker and the hearer arbitrates the conflict between them. Linguistic conventions play essential roles in "the context of justification," so to speak, rather than in "the context of discovery." From the fact that shared conventions mainly relate to the evaluation aspect of communication, it follows that the speaker and the hearer need not learn shared linguistic conventions in advance of the conversation, and have only to learn them later, when failures are detected among past communication.

Introduction

It is usually thought that rules and conventions are indispensable for coordination of our social activities. In particular, few doubt the necessity of linguistic rules or conventions, because the complexity of our communicative practice is well recognized. Donald Davidson challenged this widely held view about communication.

In "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs," Davidson argued that what is

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necessary and sufficient for communication to succeed is that the speaker shares with the hearer what he calls “passing theory,” a theory of interpretation that is formed and used on each occasion of conversation (Davidson 1986). He then asserted that a language both governed by shared rules or conventions and known to the speaker and the hearer in advance is theoretically neither necessary nor sufficient for communication to succeed, and in fact, there is no such thing whatsoever¹.

The first thing he reminds us is that, strictly speaking, different persons speak different languages, because their vocabularies are different and every word has a slightly different meaning for each person. The second is the frequency with which malapropisms are observed in everyday communication. And the third is that despite these problems, we can usually understand each other. From these facts, Davidson concluded that what is essential for successful communication is the general power of reason needed for the case by case interpretation of utterances rather than rules or conventions shared and prepared in advance.

This was a natural extension of the accomplishment of the radical interpretation argument to the situations of everyday communication. In “Communication and Convention,” Davidson states the following:

Knowledge of the conventions of language is thus a practical crutch to interpretation, a crutch we cannot in practice afford to do without—but a crutch which, under optimum conditions for communication, we can in the end throw away, and could in theory have

¹ In “A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs,” Davidson states the following:

[W]hat interpreter and speaker share, to the extent that communication succeeds, is not learned and so is not a language governed by rules or conventions known to speaker and interpreter in advance; but what the speaker and interpreter know in advance is not (necessarily) shared, and so is not a language governed by shared rules or conventions. (Davidson 1986, p. 445)

On the one hand, passing theory is shared between the speaker and the hearer as long as communication succeeds, but it is not learned in advance. On the other hand, they know their idiolects in advance but those idiolects are not shared. From this, Davidson concludes that there is no such thing as a language, something which is both shared and learned in advance.

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done without from the start. The fact that radical interpretation is so commonplace—the fact, that is, that we use our standard method of interpretation only as a useful starting point in understanding a speaker—is hidden from us by many things, foremost among them being that syntax is so much more social than semantics (Davidson 1984, p. 279).

He thought that if we can finally interpret utterances in totally unknown language with the aid of the principles of charity, in everyday communication, too, previous knowledge about the language must be theoretically inessential as well, although some practical importance of the previous knowledge must be acknowledged.

Davidson's daring conclusion that there is no such thing as a language was so counterintuitive that it has invited much criticism. The most well-known criticism might be that of Michael Dummett (Dummett 1986). He equated Davidson's view of language to the revised version of Humpty Dumpty's view of language, in which the meaning of a word is determined by what the speaker means by that word. Dummett objected that we, on the contrary, as Alice did, usually consider that the meaning of a word is determined socially and independently of any language user, and the speaker is held responsible to the socially accepted use of words². In addition, I. Hacking (Hacking 1986), M. Reimer (Reimer 2004), S. C. Goldberg (Goldberg 2004), and M. Williams (Williams 2000), to mention a few, expressed their criticism of Davidson.

However, in this paper, I want to investigate the problem from a different viewpoint rather than examine the validity of those criticisms. Although those criticisms were done by accepting all the provisos assumed by Davidson, I would like to question one of the provisos itself. More specifically, I will identify the flaw in Davidson's confinement of his remark to successful communication.

Davidson states the reason of his confinement as follows:

What should we say of the many cases in which a speaker expects, or hopes, to be understood in a certain way but isn't? I can't see that it matters. If we bear in mind that the notion of meaning is a theoretical concept which can't explain communication but depends on it, we can harmlessly relate it to successful communication in whatever ways we find convenient (Davidson 2005, p. 121).

In contrast to Davidson, I think that those cases do matter and require

² See Dummett 1986, p. 470f.

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substantial attention³, and the necessity of shared linguistic conventions becomes evident when communication fails. His unusual conclusions are derived from his disregard of failed communication.

In the following, I will use the phrase “linguistic conventions” rather than “linguistic rules.” For the word “rules” connotes codified regulations about linguistic expressions that can be listed as dictionaries, whereas it is difficult to make regulations of communication explicit, and as they include appropriate relations between linguistic expressions and situations of utterances as well, the word “conventions” is more suitable to represent that broad sense.

1. Failure of Communication

Communication is successful when the hearer correctly understands what the speaker intended the hearer to understand by her utterance. Meanwhile, we can classify failures of communication roughly into two groups. The first group contains the cases in which the hearer fails to decipher the speaker’s intention. Davidson provided the case of Humpty Dumpty⁴ as an example of this kind of communication failure. Humpty Dumpty said to Alice, “There is glory for you,” and Alice, not comprehending what he had meant, replied to him “I don’t know what you mean by ‘glory’.” The second group covers the cases in which the hearer misunderstands the speaker’s intention. I want to focus exclusively on the failures of the second group. Davidson did not make any explicit mention of the latter kind of failures. Therefore, I must guess Davidson’s opinions about those kinds of failures from indirect evidence. Here I want to concentrate especially on his opinion about the *responsibility* for the failure of communication. By doing so, Davidson’s inconsistent attitudes will emerge.

³ I do not think this objection interferes with Davidson’s principle that the notion of meaning is dependent on successful communication which is expressed in the latter part of the quotation. As stated below, my contention is that the meaning of words is dependent not only on present successful communication but also on past and future successful communications. That is to say, the meaning of words is dependent also on past successful communication that linguistic conventions contain as the paradigm, and future successful communication that evaluates past failed communication.

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In “A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs,” Davidson wrote that there is no difference between knowing a language and knowing our way around in the world generally.

[W]e should realize that we have abandoned not only the ordinary notion of a language, but we have erased the boundary between knowing a language and knowing our way around in the world generally. For there are no rules for arriving at passing theories, no rules in any strict sense, as opposed to rough maxims and methodological generalities (Davidson 1986, p. 445f).

In scientific investigation, scientists interpret natural phenomena and try to predict what will occur in the future. Their predictions are occasionally wrong. When scientists make incorrect assumptions, only the scientists, the interpreters of natural phenomena, should be held responsible for the failure. For, natural phenomena, which are interpreted by scientists, cannot take any responsibility. Similarly, in everyday conversation, the hearer interprets the speaker’s utterance, and forms some expectations. These expectations occasionally turn out to be incorrect. If, as Davidson said, there is no difference between knowing a language and knowing our way around in the world, in everyday conversation, too, it is the hearer, the interpreter of the speaker’s utterance, who alone should be held responsible for the failure of predictions.

However, Davidson implied the complete opposite in another paper. In “The Second Person,” as a response to the argument propounded by Wittgenstein and Kripke, he proposed that a distinction between correct and incorrect uses of words can be drawn by adopting the speaker’s intention as the norm.

But haven’t we, by eliminating the condition that the speaker must go on as the interpreter (or others) would, at the same time inadvertently destroyed all chance of characterizing linguistic error? If there is no social practice with which to compare the speaker’s performance, won’t whatever the speaker says be, as Wittgenstein remarks, in accord with some rule (i.e. in accord with some language)? If the speech behavior of others does not provide the norm for the speaker, what can? The answer is that the intention of the speaker to be interpreted in a certain way provides the ‘norm’; the speaker falls short of his intention if he fails to speak in such a way as to be understood as he intended (Davidson 2001, p. 116).

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Davidson here equated the distinction between the correct way and the incorrect way of using words with whether the speaker's intention to be interpreted in a certain way is fulfilled or not. This is, in other words, equating the distinction between the correct way and the incorrect way of using words with the distinction between success and failure of communication. However, everyone who accepts this equation must also accept the following implication: whenever conversation fails, the speaker uses words incorrectly. In contrast to the previous paragraph, here Davidson shifted all the responsibility for the failure of communication onto the speaker.

We usually think that the hearer is not always responsible for the failure to interpret the speaker's utterance. We think that the speaker should be held responsible in some cases. It seems to me that in this particular point, knowing a language critically differs from knowing our way around in the world generally. In addition, the assumption that all communication failures are caused by the speaker's inappropriate way of using words is also counterintuitive. We naturally assume that there are cases in which, although the speaker uses words correctly, the conversation fails because the hearer interprets the speaker's words incorrectly.

The dyad of what the speaker intended and what the hearer understood is enough to distinguish successful communication from failed communication. And it might be unnecessary to introduce more than that as long as only successful communications are considered. Davidson, who at one time shifts all the responsibilities onto the speaker and at another time onto the hearer, misses the trivial fact that some of the communication failures are due to the speaker's fault and others are due to the hearer's fault.

To determine which party is responsible for the failure, a third term, in addition to the dyad, is needed. The notion of what the speaker said is thus added as the third term⁴. Communication is unsuccessful when the speaker's intention

⁴ I have learned this point from J. M. Saul. Saul states the following:

Saying something does not guarantee audience uptake but does mean that the speaker has fulfilled her communicative responsibilities with regard to explicit content (as she wouldn't have done if she chose words which didn't have the conventional meaning that she intended). Similarly, conversationally implicating

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differs from the hearer's interpretation. By adding the third term, the notion of what the speaker said, the location of responsibility can also be clarified: when what the speaker said agrees with what the speaker intended, and the discrepancies are between what the speaker said and what the hearer understood, it is the hearer who should be held responsible. In contrast, when what the hearer understood accords with what the speaker said, and discrepancies are between what the speaker said and what the speaker intended, it is the speaker who is responsible. Of course, there can be cases in which the triad of what the speaker intended, what the speaker said, and what the hearer understood disagree with each other. In those cases, both the speaker and the hearer are at fault.

What the speaker said must be dissociable from both what the speaker intended and what the hearer understood, because the dissociation from what the speaker said determines the location of responsibility for communication failures. Moreover, as I have stressed, some communication failures are due to the speaker's fault and others are due to the hearer's fault. For the notion of what the speaker said to become the arbiter, it needs support from something independent of the speculations of both the speaker and the hearer. I assert that it is linguistic conventions that support the notion of what the speaker said.

The only distinction Davidson recognizes is the distinction between success and failure of communication. On the other hand, I have introduced another distinction, that between communication failures caused by the speaker and those caused by the hearer. I should point out that the two distinctions are qualitatively different: although both speakers and hearers prefer communication that succeeds to communication that fails, when communication does fail, speakers want hearers to take the responsibility and hearers want speakers to take the responsibility. Although the interests of speakers and those of hearers are in harmony in the former distinction, they conflict with each other in the latter distinction. It is when

something also fails to guarantee audience uptake but does mean that the speaker has fulfilled her communicative responsibilities with regard to what she wants to communicate beyond what she says. She may not have communicated her intended message, but she has *made it available*. (Saul 2002, p244f)

My own contribution is that I applied Saul's interpretation to the context of Davidson. As Saul says, strictly speaking, I must add what the speaker implied to what the speaker said. About this issue, see also endnote 14.

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two interests conflict with each other that a *tertium quid* is necessary. Linguistic conventions are invoked as a *tertium quid* to settle the conflict in communication. We can distinguish successful communication from failed communication without “social practice with which to compare the speaker’s performance.” On the contrary, without “social practice with which to compare the speaker’s performance,” we cannot determine whether the speaker or the hearer is responsible for the failure.

Let us see the same thing from another viewpoint. Why can we appropriately interpret the utterance of a speaker whom we have never met before? This is because we utilize our experiences about *past* utterances of *other speakers* to interpret the present utterance. Davidson also approved this⁵. However, approving only that is not enough. The hearer not only does so, but she also does so because she has the right to do so. It is when communication fails that the fact that the speaker has the right to do so becomes evident. For, just when the speaker’s intention and the hearer’s interpretation disagree, it becomes an issue as to whether it was appropriate that the hearer interpreted the speaker’s utterance as she actually did. The hearer is judged as having correctly interpreted the speaker’s utterance if she interpreted it according to other previous speakers’ communicative practice. In that case, the hearer can blame the speaker⁶. Linguistic conventions play essential roles in “the context of justification” of an interpretation, so to speak, rather than in “the context of discovery” of that.

Davidson’s supporters might object that he was able to talk about the location of responsibility within his system of philosophy even though, in fact, he did not. They might argue that, for instance, the degrees of rationality can be compared and the less reasonable party is held responsible. The difficulty of this argument is that it assumes that the comparison of rationality does not need invocation of

⁵ “If we ask for a cup of coffee, direct a taxi driver, or order a crate of lemons, we may know so little about our intended interpreter that we can do no better than to assume that he will interpret our speech along what we take to be standard lines.” (Davidson 1986, p. 103)

⁶ The idea that the hearer can invoke the facts about other previous speaker’s utterances to justify her interpretation of the present utterance is what I learned from S. C. Goldberg (Goldberg 2004, p. 409). However, he propounds this in the context of epistemological justification of testimonial knowledge, and he lacks the perspective of the allocation of responsibility raised in this paper.

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linguistic conventions. When we determine the location of responsibility, we cannot avoid discussing what the words of the speaker *usually mean* in the context at issue. And we cannot say “usually mean” without considering linguistic conventions.

On the other hand, the opponents of Davidson might object to my position that the convention is not irrelevant also when communication succeeds. Dummett, for example, wrote as follows:

Figures of speech and other deliberately non-standard uses apart, a speaker holds himself responsible to the accepted meanings of words and expressions in the language or dialect he purports to be speaking; his willingness to withdraw or correct what he has said when made aware of a mistake about the meaning of the word in the common language therefore distinguishes erroneous uses from intentionally deviant ones (Dummett 1986, p. 462).

He drew to our attention to the fact that we usually correct our inappropriate expressions whenever we find them. Dummett thinks this demonstrates the existence of linguistic conventions to conform to. Davidson rebuts this and asserts that word usage that offends linguistic conventions is no more problematic than bad table manners as long as communication succeeds, and that linguistic conventions are inessential for communication.

Using a word in a nonstandard way out of ignorance may be a *faux pas* in the same way that using the wrong fork at a dinner party is, and it has as little to do with communication as using the wrong fork has to do with nourishing oneself, given that the word is understood and the fork works (Davidson 2005, p. 117).

Davidson overlooks the critical difference between table manners at dinner and linguistic conventions of communication. The goal of dinner is receiving nutrition where the goal of communication is transmitting information. However, although violation of table manners does not endanger nutrition intake (in many cases, just the opposite is true!), violation of linguistic conventions increases the probability that the transmission of information fails. Even if communication succeeds, in practice, we rebuke the speaker who offended the norm. This is because we perceive that the communication *nearly failed* due to the fault of the

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speaker⁷. Thus, word usages that offend linguistic conventions are, it seems to me, more problematic in an important sense than bad table manners, even if communication succeeds in actuality.

I will not investigate this point further. My claim is that linguistic conventions are indispensable when communication fails, and I remain neutral about whether the necessity of conventions is apparent even if we confine our attention to successful communication. In addition, I do not claim that linguistic conventions are sufficient for the allocation of responsibility for a communication failure. The assumption that both the speaker and the hearer are rational is also necessary to determine what the speaker said. This point will be discussed in Section 4. In the next section, I will investigate some features of everyday communication that make the allocation of responsibility necessary.

2. Why is Allocation of Responsibility Necessary?

In Section 1, I argued that linguistic conventions are necessary for the allocation of the responsibility for failed communication. Now, why is the allocation of responsibility necessary in the first place? The hearer becomes aware of her misunderstanding of the speaker's intention when she grasps the speaker's true intention. If the goal of communication is that the hearer should interpret the speaker's intention correctly, is it not thus all settled? Is not examining past errors and investigating who is to blame for the fault an inessential part of communicative practice? In this section, I will discuss the reason why we need to allocate the responsibility for the failure of communication.

What should be noted first is that the hearer changes her position relying on the speaker's words in everyday communication. It is not true that one has

⁷ My claim is almost the same as that of Dummett's. In "The Social Character of Meaning," Dummett says the following:

In employing words of the English language, we have to be held responsible to their socially accepted use, on pain of failing to communicate, except in so far as we give explicit notice of any deviations we choose to make. (Dummett 1978, p. 429)

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dialogue with only a particular person all the time. Everyday communication is like commercial transactions. Just as in commercial transactions where person B who has obtained something from person A will give it to person C or will use it by herself, in everyday communication, person B who has heard some information from person A will tell it to person C or will take some actions by herself based on that information.

Davidson argued that radical interpretation is so commonplace that it is also found in everyday communication. However, if we consider radical interpretation as launching an interpretation of an utterance with no information about the speaker's language in advance, he has neglected the important difference between everyday communication and radical interpretation. When a field linguist contacts an unknown language for the first time, she does not think that she has obtained the data necessary to determine what a speaker of that language has said with enough accuracy *by the time the speaker finishes speaking*. Although she may have several hypotheses about the meaning by that time, they are far from definitive, and she thinks future accumulation of linguistic data will probably make her revise the interpretation of that utterance substantially. Therefore, the radical interpreter usually does not change her position based on the interpretation immediately.

The same thing occurs when we read the classics. The classics require readers to read them again and again. You cannot appreciate what the author writes on page ten of a great book only by reading from page one to page ten of that book. What is written on page one hundred will probably change your interpretation of page ten. This is one of the consequences of the famous hermeneutic circle—interpretation of the parts depends on the interpretation of the larger whole, which in turn depends on the interpretation of the parts. Therefore, readers of the classics must not hastily conclude what the author writes only by reading the first part of the book.

Everyday communication is not like that. One of the essential aspects of everyday communication is that the hearer changes her position based on the speaker's words, and the information needed to interpret the speaker's utterance with enough accuracy is considered to be *available* for the hearer *by the time the speaker finishes speaking*⁸. Imagine a case as follows: On September 1st, Abe was

⁸ Needless to say, the hearer might not have the necessary knowledge available to her. This can happen when the hearer does not know the conventional usage of

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visiting Betty's house. When he was leaving, Abe said to Betty, "I will bring some *melons* to you tomorrow," although he really intended to tell her that he will bring some *lemons*. Hearing that, Betty made a phone call to her friend Cathy that night, and invited Cathy for lunch to have some slices of melon with her and Abe the next day. However, on September 2nd, Abe turned up in Betty's house with a handful of lemons!

From Abe's behavior of September 2nd, Betty may realize that what he really intended the day before was to inform her that he would bring some lemons. But it is too late. For, she has changed her position to her detriment before she realizes Abe's true intention. In this case, she has prepared the dishes for melons, and disappointed her friend accidentally. In everyday communication, because it is necessary to determine who is responsible for that kind of loss, not only the hearer's *final* understanding of the speaker's intention, but also determining which party caused the hearer's misunderstanding *at the time the speaker finishes speaking*, are essential elements of communication.

Successful communication is certainly ontologically prior to failed communication; because to talk about the failure of communication and to settle the problem, most conversations must succeed. However, that does not justify one's neglecting failed communication, because what we actually do to cope with the failure of communication is an indispensable part of communicative practice.

Moreover, in this case, it is obvious that Abe had said to Mary that he would bring some melons to her, and the failure of communication was Abe's fault⁹. On the basis of this observation, I can strike back at the objection that the difference between radical interpretation and everyday communication is a matter of degree, and everyday communication, too, must be involved in the hermeneutic circle. To be sure, *the interpretation of what the speaker intended* is involved in the hermeneutic circle in everyday communication, too, and needs optimization taking future utterances of the speaker into account. However, we cannot suppose that *the determination of what the speaker said* is also involved in the hermeneutic circle in the same way. Because, if what the speaker said was dependent on the speaker's future utterances, the hearer would be blamed for the kind of communication failures she can never avoid. This is too severe on the hearer and

the words the speaker has used. In those cases, the hearer is responsible for the failure of communication.

⁹ I will argue about this point from another viewpoint in Section 4.

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too inequitable to accept. The interpretation of the speaker's intention is involved in the hermeneutic circle, whereas the determination of what was said by the speaker is not; this admits the discrepancies between what the speaker intended and what the speaker said. Therefore, it allows the speaker to take responsibility for the failure of communication.

3. How do Conventions Relate to Communicative Practice?

Through the above argument, the necessity of linguistic conventions in everyday communication was demonstrated. However, a problem still remains. I have stressed in Section 1 that linguistic conventions must be independent of the speculations of the speaker and the hearer for them to be able to arbitrate between the speaker and the hearer in a dispute. Therefore, they must not be too close to the parties concerned. They, on the other hand, must not be too far removed from the parties concerned. If linguistic conventions are to actually arbitrate between the two parties, they must be related to communicative practice¹⁰. I want to discuss this latter point in this section. How do conventions relate to communicative practice? And how do they maintain proper distance from the speaker and the hearer?

A conflict on legal affairs is arbitrated by a court of justice. In contrast, in conflicts on everyday communication, we can hardly obtain arbitration by a third person or a third institution accepted both by the speaker and the hearer as an authority¹¹. If the arbitration by a third party is unrealistic, linguistic conventions must be learned by the parties concerned, namely by the speaker and the hearer for them to be able to relate to communicative practice. However, as is often

¹⁰ This problem is akin to the problem of how norms relate to normative activities. Referring to this, Davidson stated the following: "Which is conceptually primary, the idiolect or the language? If the former, the apparent absence of a social norm makes it hard to account for success in communication; if the latter, the danger is that the norm has no clear relation to practice." (Davidson 2005, p. 109)

¹¹ When the conflict due to the failure of communication grows so serious that the parties concerned cannot settle it by themselves, legal action is actually taken. However, those kinds of cases are relatively rare.

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mentioned, because of the difference in the linguistic environment experienced, what the speaker knows about her language is not the same as what the hearer knows about the same language. One might object that the disagreement is small and should not be exaggerated. Yet, the failure of communication is often caused by that small disagreement over the understanding of the language.

This is a really delicate problem. I cannot propose more than a rough sketch of the solution to this problem. First, we should notice that there are people who are said to share the same language (or dialect) despite the factual disagreement over the understanding of the language (or dialect) among them. These people are in agreement on the point *that* they share the same conventions, though they are not in agreement on *what* they share. That is to say, in everyday communication, the speaker and the hearer consider that they share the same conventions.

This advance agreement alone is a vacant agreement, for it involves no substantial content. It is when some failures of communication are detected, and when the speaker and the hearer try to allocate the responsibility for the failures, that the agreement gains weight. At that very moment, they confirm *what* is conventional for the first time. Yet, the day when they reach complete agreement on what is conventional will never come. What they make each time is a partial agreement sufficient to determine *which* was conventional, in other words, to determine which of the two is responsible for the failure. Therefore, the meaning of the agreement beforehand is, virtually, that they have an advance consensus that they will strive for the agreement over the responsibility for the communication failures that will occur in the future.

Davidson is correct in saying that there are no conventions that are previously learned and shared. For, in spite of the beforehand consensus over sharing of the same conventions between the speaker and the hearer, they do not correctly grasp, in advance, the agreement on what is conventional that will be reached in the future. However, the knowledge about what is conventional is not needed in advance to conform to linguistic conventions. That knowledge is needed only later, when the failure of communication is detected. A typical example is that the speaker is later accused of her idiosyncratic usage of words that caused the hearer's misunderstanding.

Why did Davidson persist in the preparation of shared conventions? My guess is as follows. First, he thought that only what is learned before a certain conversation can influence *the success or failure* of that conversation. And second,

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he thought that to have an effect on the conversation's success or failure is the only way to relate to the communicative practice. It is certain that to assume that what is learned after a certain conversation can influence the success or failure of that conversation is contraccusal. Therefore, I completely agree with Davidson about the first point. However, I am against the second point. As mentioned before, the allocation of the responsibility for communication failures is another part of communicative practice, and what is learned after a certain conversation can influence *the evaluation* of that conversation.

4. Conventions are not Sufficient

As discussed above, to allocate the responsibility for the failure of communication, we need the notion of what the speaker said as the *tertium quid*, the notion separated both from the speaker's intention and the hearer's interpretation. I also argued that linguistic conventions are *necessary* to determine what the speaker said independently from the speculations of the speaker and the hearer. However, this is not the only thing that must be considered when we determine what was said by the speaker. Linguistic conventions are not *sufficient* to determine what the speaker said, and the notion of the reasonable hearer who assumes that the speaker is reasonable is also required.

The goal of communication is that the hearer understands the speaker's intention. Therefore, both the speaker and the hearer must cooperate to achieve that goal. Although this imposes the obligation to choose the words according to the shared linguistic conventions on the part of the speaker, this imposes certain obligation on the part of the hearer, too. The obligation of the hearer is the obligation to follow the principles of charity when she interprets the speaker. As in the case of malapropisms, when the standard interpretation of the speaker's utterance attributes absurd beliefs to the speaker, the hearer must modify her interpretation properly, or at least has a duty to ask the speaker about the meaning of the utterance.

The applications of the principles of charity are not confined to the cases of malapropisms. For example, we determine the reference of pronouns and reconstruct the ellipses from the inferences based on the supposition that the

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speaker is reasonable¹². If a conversation failed due to the speaker's violation of the principles of charity, it is the speaker who is held responsible. In such a case, the hearer misunderstood what the speaker said.

In Section 1, I mentioned the relation between what the speaker said and who is responsible for the failure of communication, and argued that what the speaker said determines the location of responsibility. This order of determination can be reversed. If we know the location of responsibility in advance, we can determine what the speaker said from the location of responsibility: if the speaker is responsible, what the speaker said is equal to what the hearer understood, whereas if the hearer is responsible, what the speaker said is equal to what the speaker intended.

For this reason, what the speaker said can be equated with what the *ideal* hearer would have understood. Since the ideal hearer is irreproachable by definition, we can assume that there is no distance between what was said by the speaker and the interpretation of the ideal hearer. Therefore, the location of responsibility can be determined by comparing the triad of the speaker's intention, the actual hearer's interpretation, and ideal hearer's interpretation. The merit of the introduction of the ideal hearer is that we can demonstrate whether the actual hearer fulfilled her obligations by the comparison between the actual hearer and the hearer who is supposed to have fulfilled her obligations.

To conclude this paper, I want to examine what Mrs. Malaprop, Humpty Dumpty, and our Abe said, by imagining how the ideal hearer would interpret their utterances.

Mrs. Malaprop vs. Captain Absolute: According to Linguistic conventions, Mrs. Malaprop said that if she reprehended any thing in the world, it was the use of her oracular tongue, and a nice derangement of epitaphs¹³. This interpretation is blocked by the principles of charity. For, this interpretation attributes absurd beliefs to her. Her true intention is obvious from the context and the similarity of

¹² It might be that the assumption that the speaker is following the Gricean conversational maxims is needed in addition to the principles of charity. However, I cannot discuss more about the relation between the principles of charity and the conversational maxims. About the conversational maxims, see "Logic and Conversation." (Grice 1989)

¹³ Sheridan 1979, Act 3, Scene 3.

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sounds, and the ideal hearer would interpret her as intending to say that if she apprehended any thing in the world, it was the use of her vernacular tongue, and a nice arrangement of epithets. If Captain Absolute was unconscious of Mrs. Malaprop's malapropism and changed his position based on his misunderstandings, the one who is to blame is Captain Absolute, not Mrs. Malaprop.

Humpty Dumpty vs. Alice: We can conclude that Humpty Dumpty, who uttered the sentence "There is glory for you," said nothing. For, the ideal hearer who suddenly received a sentence like that would reserve hasty judgment about the speaker's intention. Alice, who replied "I do not know what you mean by 'glory'," reacted to Humpty Dumpty appropriately.

Abe vs. Betty: In this case, Abe is considered to have said that he would bring some melons to Betty the next day¹⁴. Linguistic conventions shared by both Abe and Betty support Betty, because, although there are countless past cases in which the word "melons" is used to mean melons, there are few cases in which the word "melons" is used to mean lemons. In addition to that, we cannot say that the conversation failed because Betty did not appropriately follow the principles of charity in this case. This is because even the ideal hearer could not take into consideration the information which would be given on September 2nd on September 1st, when Betty made a phone call to Cathy to invite her to have some slices of melon. In everyday communication, the hearer cannot be accused of not considering the information that is available only after she has changed her position.

¹⁴ In this case, the ideal hearer would consider Abe not only as saying that he will bring some melons on September 2nd to Betty's house, but also as implying that he will give them to Betty. If Abe brought some melons solely to display them to Betty, she, who has prepared dishes for melons and has invited Cathy to have some slices of melon together, would have the right to accuse him. The speaker is responsible for what she implicated in addition to what she said.

Conventions and Failures of Communication

Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that the necessity of linguistic conventions lies in the allocation of responsibilities for the hearer's loss caused by her changing of position based on her misunderstanding of the speaker's utterance. The reason Davidson has lost sight of the necessity of linguistic conventions and has regarded a language as individualistic and ephemeral is because he unreasonably confined his sight to successful communication. If we broaden our view to include failed communication, we can regain sight of a language that is both social and temporally extended.

In addition, from the fact that linguistic conventions are needed when the speaker and the hearer evaluate previously failed communication, it follows that shared linguistic conventions are not required to be learned in advance for them to relate to communicative practice. Davidson thought that shared conventions, if such things exist, must be learned in advance of the conversation. This is because he only saw the success or failure of communication, and neglected the problems that occur when communication does fail.

I cannot afford to discuss in detail how linguistic conventions are learned, and how those learned conventions lead to the evaluation of failed communication. However, I believe that this paper has some significance because it shows the relation between linguistic conventions and communicative practice from a new perspective.

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