

Proto Sociology

An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research

Vol. 17, 2002

Semantic Theory and Reported Speech

CONTENTS

THE MEANING OF WHAT IS SAID AND THE AScription OF ATTITUDES

The Semantic Significance of What is Said	7
<i>Emma Borg</i>	
Representing What Others Say	26
<i>Cara Spencer</i>	
The Things People Say	46
<i>Jonathan Sutton</i>	
Reported Speech and the Epistemology of Testimony	59
<i>Sanford C. Goldberg</i>	
Reports and Imagination	78
<i>Eros Corazza</i>	

PROPOSITIONAL CONTENT AND COGNITIVE STRUCTURE

On Representing Content	101
<i>David Hunter</i>	
Conceptual Realism and Interpretation	119
<i>Max A. Freund</i>	

Content Partialism and Davidson's Dilemma	138
<i>Corey Washington</i>	
Vagueness, Indirect Speech Reports, and the World	153
<i>Steven Gross</i>	

ON CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Epistemological Remarks Concerning the Concepts "Theory" and "Theoretical Concepts"	171
<i>Hans Lenk</i>	
Social Science and (Null) Hypothesis Testing: Some Ontological Issues	188
<i>Steven Miller and Marcel Fredericks</i>	
Contributors	202
Imprint	203
On ProtoSociology	204
Published Volumes	205
Bookpublications	213
Subscription / Digital Version	232
ProtoSociology: Digital volumes available	233

VAGUENESS, INDIRECT SPEECH REPORTS, AND THE WORLD

Steven Gross

Abstract

Can all truths be stated in precise language? Not if true indirect speech reports of assertions entered using vague language must themselves use vague language. Sententialism – the view that an indirect speech report is true if and only if the report’s complement clause “same-says” the sentence the original speaker uttered – provides two ways of resisting this claim: first, by allowing that precise language can “same-say” vague language; second, by implying that expressions occurring in an indirect speech report’s complement clause are not used. I reject the first line of resistance, but argue that the second is successful if one accepts sententialism.

I. Introduction

Vagueness is a pervasive feature of natural language. This is not surprising, given our sensory and cognitive endowments and limitations: vague expressions are easier to learn and apply than precise replacements would be, and bestow a beneficial flexibility. So, perhaps we shouldn’t expect or desire to eliminate vagueness from natural language generally. Still, it might be thought that at least in principle all truths can be stated in precise language.

Why might one think this? One reason might be an antecedent commitment to the supervenience of the vague on the precise.¹ But does it follow *generally*, from the supervenience of truths stated using X-expressions on truths stated using Y-language, that the former could be stated using only Y-language? It would be very controversial to claim on the basis merely of the relevant supervenience claim, for example, that all truths stated using non-physical vocabulary can be stated using physical vocabulary. Indeed, supervenience relations are of interest precisely because they promise naturalistic acceptability without *reduction*. It has been argued that this promise is not fulfilled, that supervenience of the relevant variety entails reduction.² But the

1 Compare Timothy Williamson (1994: 108): “... vague properties *supervene* on precise ones. A tempting conclusion to draw, but not a necessary one, is that the world can be completely described without resort to vague language.”

2 See Jaegwon Kim (1989: 31-47).

argument remains controversial, in part owing to its reliance on infinite disjunction. Moreover, even if it succeeds, the reduction that supervenience is supposed to yield arguably involves entities individuated more coarsely than “truths”. And, even if it is “truths” that have been reduced, it doesn’t yet follow that the reduced truths can be *stated* in the base vocabulary: even if properties or propositions may be infinitely disjoined, sentences we can state must be finite. All this might be beside the point: even if the move from supervenience to statability in the base vocabulary doesn’t hold *generally*, someone might try shouldering the burden of showing that there are auxiliary premises, underwritten by features particular to the case, that *do* allow one to infer that all truths can be stated in precise language from the supervenience of the vague on the precise.

Some variety of realist convictions might provide a second route to the claim that all truths can be stated in precise language. Very crudely, one might hold that the world just is all the truths, or what makes all the truths true; and that (up to inter-translatability) there exists a unique true and complete description of the world as it is independent of our conception of it in virtue of a “correspondence” between the description and the world. Suppose one also holds that it is incoherent, or at least false, that the world is or could be *itself* vague; and that vagueness is a kind of *semantic* indeterminacy, not a matter of in-principle ignorance as epistemicism would have it.³ Then the unique true and complete description, if it is to correspond with the world, must also be free of vagueness. Assuming the unique true and complete description is something we can *state* (whether or not we could *know* it to be true),⁴ it would follow that all truths can be stated in precise language.⁵

This might be given a scientific twist. Here’s one way (again, crudely): suppose one holds that the only truths there are – perhaps, the only *objective* truths – are scientific truths. But science aims to carve nature at the joints, to describe things as they are independently of our conceptions of them. So, there is an intention that the expressions used to describe these kinds of things have their content fixed by the nature of that which they aim to describe. But it is incoherent or at least false that those things or their natures are themselves vague. So, the content they fix isn’t either. So, insofar as we

3 See Williamson: 185-215.

4 It’s thus assumed that there’s no in-principle obstacle to our minimally grasping and thus expressing whatever concepts are necessary to formulate the description.

5 Vagueness is pressed as a problem for such realists by, for example, Hilary Putnam (1983: 297-314).

succeed in stating truths at all, those truths can be stated using precise language.

Whatever reasons one may have, whether some more developed version of some portion of the above or some other reasons, they must be wrong if vague language is required to describe the very real phenomenon of vagueness itself. That vague language *is* required to describe the phenomenon of vagueness is a theme of Timothy Williamson's *Vagueness*. Williamson constructs a persuasive case, in particular, for the claim that vague language is required to state the properties of vague *expressions*. He also, however, suggests that vague language must be used to report what speakers *assert* using vague language. This note critically examines this more specific suggestion.⁶ Even if one agrees with Williamson's conclusion that not all truths can be stated precisely, one wants to know, so far as possible, precisely what truths yield the ineliminability of vagueness.

II. The Argument

Williamson writes: "... since people use vague language, vague language is needed to report what they have said. ... a well-chosen 'that'-clause *reproduces* what was said ...". He doesn't explicitly endorse the suggested argument, nor does he pretend to have developed it in detail. But he does say that it presents a "serious difficulty for the idea that all truths can be stated in precise language."⁷

The suggested argument would take something like the following form. Natural language users enter assertions using vague expressions. In addition to this general truth, there are all the specific truths reporting such assertions – that is, indirect speech reports of the canonical form 'S said that P'.⁸ In order for such reports to be true, they must accurately report what was asserted. This places a constraint on the expressions appearing in a report's complement clause. What is this constraint? Williamson – perhaps not speaking in his own voice, but rather in the voice of an imagined promulgator of the argument – requires that the complement clause in some sense *reproduce* what was said. This doesn't mean that the actual *words* uttered (in-

6 Both the suggested argument and the critical discussion could be generalized to other attitude ascriptions.

7 Williamson (93).

8 Read quotation marks as corner-quotes where necessary. I follow others in using the past-tense, since examples can sometimes sound funny in the present-tense. But I'll ignore tense when glossing truth-conditions.

cluding the vague ones) must be reproduced, but presumably that their *content* – or relevant *aspects* thereof – must be reproduced, perhaps using other words. If among the relevant aspects to be reproduced is the vagueness of some vague expression actually uttered, and if this can be reproduced only by employing an expression that is also vague,⁹ then the complement clause itself, and thus the report as a whole, will need to employ vague language. It would thus follow that there are truths – specifically, true indirect speech reports of assertions entered using vague language – that can only be stated using vague language.¹⁰

Clearly, the crucial step in the argument is the assumption that there is a condition on the truth of indirect speech reports from which it follows that indirect speech reports of assertions entered using vague expressions must themselves use vague expressions. In what follows, I examine how this claim fares in the context of one account of indirect speech reports: sententialism.¹¹

III. Indirect Speech Reports: Sententialism

The basic idea of sententialism is to take the truth of an indirect speech report ‘S said that P’ to depend on the relation in which S stands to the *sentence* ‘P.’ In what relation must S stand to ‘P’ in order for the report to be

- 9 One might require more weakly that it is *sometimes* the case that the relevant aspect of the used vague expression can be reproduced only by using a vague expression in the complement clause. See below.
- 10 This argument does not require that there be any vague non-embedded sentence (or utterance thereof) that *itself* expresses a truth. It’s perfectly consistent with the premises and conclusion of the suggested argument that all vague non-embedded sentences express falsehoods, or have some other truth-status other than truth, or even fail to express anything truth-evaluable at all. (Perhaps then we would speak of *making as if* to assert.) So, the argument would be available even to a “nihilist” about non-embedded vague sentences – at least if this nihilist’s reasons for maintaining her position didn’t force her to be nihilistic as well about indirect speech reports containing vague expressions.
- 11 Versions of sententialism have been endorsed by various philosophers, but contemporary sententialists trace their views in particular to Donald Davidson (1968-9: 130-46). My discussing the suggested argument in light of sententialism is not meant to constitute an *endorsement* of sententialism. Insofar as sententialism has any plausibility, however, and sententialism doesn’t support the suggested argument’s crucial premise, then that premise will have been shown to be controversial. Correlatively, if sententialism can be *rejected*, much of my discussion will be drained of interest. (For replies to some standard objections to sententialism, see Ernest Lepore and Barry Loewer (1989: 338-356.) Of course, the rejection of sententialism wouldn’t *establish* the crucial premise. For example, a version of the “interpreted logical form” approach to attitude ascriptions might also be used to challenge the crucial premise. I briefly comment on this below.

true? It can't just be that S in fact uttered that sentence, or even uttered that sentence assertorically, because we can accurately report in one language what someone said in another. Rather, it's required that S uttered some sentence that is *relevantly similar* to P. As it's often put: P must "same-say" the sentence S actually uttered. There is much room for refinement here: for instance, we might want to understand same-saying as a relation between sentence *tokens* rather than *types*.¹² But nothing in my discussion will turn on such matters of detail. For our purposes, we can work with the following statement of the truth-conditions for indirect speech reports: 'S said that P' is true iff there's a sentence *s* such that S assertorically uttered *s* and *s* same-says 'P.'

But what constitutes same-saying? Surely that's a detail we can't brush aside? It's important to note that for the statement of truth-conditions to be correct, it is not required that we be able to produce an *analysis* of same-saying. 'Steven walks' is true iff Steven walks: whether this approximates a correct assignment of truth-conditions by an empirically verified, compositional semantic theory for my idiolect seems quite independent of there being an analysis of walking. Still, in order to *understand* the statement of truth-conditions, one needs to understand sufficiently the words used. Whether or not an analysis of same-saying could be given, it is supposed that speakers' grasp of same-saying is displayed in their successfully engaging in the practice of reporting speech and assessing such reports. That said, it would indeed be useful in the discussion to follow if there *were* a non-controversial criterion of same-saying ready-to-hand that one could wield in thinking through hard cases. Lacking one, I'll explore what one can say in any event.

Before proceeding, however, I should note one aspect of same-saying that reflection on the practice of reporting speech and assessing such reports can suggest: namely, that what counts as same-saying – what counts as being relevantly similar – can vary with conversational context.¹³ For example, on some occasions, the interests of the parties to the conversation may be such

12 This provides one way of accommodating the potential relevance of various non-semantic properties, such as phonological properties, pragmatic features relevant to the determination of the semantic values of context-sensitive expressions, etc. Davidson and Lepore and Loewer advert to *utterances* of sentences in stating the truth-conditions of indirect speech reports. Of course, not all aspects of Davidson's own position must be retained for an approach to count as sententialist. In particular, one needn't accept his assimilation of the complementizer 'that' to the demonstrative 'that.' See below.

13 For expository ease, I will sometimes allow myself to speak in this manner of what counts as same-saying contextually varying instead of speaking meta-linguistically – and perhaps more properly – of what satisfies 'same-says' as contextually varying.

as to allow the reporter to utter a different proper name in the complement clause than that uttered by the original speaker, or even to replace the name with an appropriate definite descriptions – for instance, if what’s of interest to them is what the original speaker said *of* some person, as opposed to how she indicated that it was that person about whom she was speaking. On some other occasion, however, how the original speaker indicated the subject of predication might matter to those receiving the report. If this is so (in this case or in others), and if the statement of truth-conditions is not to be *itself* context-sensitive,¹⁴ then this dependence on context must be registered in the statement of truth-conditions. How this ought to be done – for example, whether a contextual parameter must be introduced into a syntactical representation of the report itself – is not pertinent to our concerns. But, in supplying the defender of the suggested argument a response to the *first* of two lines of resistance I’ll examine, I will assume that ‘same-says’ (and thus ‘says’) is context-sensitive.

IV. First Reply

The main point of the first line of resistance is this. Suppose S assertorically utters a vague sentence, a sentence with at least one vague constituent. Same-saying requires only relevant similarity. The possibility is thus raised that similarity with respect to vagueness/precision is not among those aspects that must be preserved. So, could there be a precise sentence ‘P’ appropriately similar to the uttered vague sentence such that someone could accurately report what S said by uttering ‘S said that P’? For example, suppose Sally assertorically utters ‘Bob is heavy.’ And suppose I’m conversing with someone who knows Bob and knows that Bob is a bit under six feet tall and weighs about 240 pounds; and, what’s more, there is nothing about our conversational context that has shifted the relevant comparison class for men’s weights away from what one might expect the default to be. Could I accurately report Sally’s assertion by saying, say, that Sally said that Bob weighs over 220 pounds? If I could report what Sally said using a vague expression without myself employing a vague expression, and if it were the case generally that this was so, then the existence of truths concerning what was said

14 For the view that a statement of truth-conditions, even for a context-sensitive sentence, ought not *itself* be context-sensitive, see Davidson (1976: 37); and James Higginbotham (1988: 25). For the suggestion that one might allow truth-conditional semantic theories to be themselves context-sensitive, see Steven Gross (2001: 70–5) and Peter Ludlow (1999: 63).

using vague expressions would not entail the existence of truths that cannot be expressed in precise language.¹⁵

I'm not sure that same-saying *is* sufficiently undemanding to allow such reports as 'Sally said that Bob weighs over 220 pounds' to pass as true. It's indeed not too hard to imagine circumstances in which no one, having learned that the original speaker deployed vague language, would censure the reporter whose complement clause was precise. But the inappropriateness of censure doesn't show that 'S said that P' is true: perhaps the report is false, but provides grounds for something that *is* true as well as conversationally salient, such as that S *believes* that P. Suppose, though, that we grant that at least in *some* cases one may truly report what was said using a vague expression via a report whose complement clause is precise – and thus that we reject the suggested argument's crucial premise. The possibility would remain, however, that in *some* cases one could not. If the crucial premise is thus weakened – from requiring in *all* cases that accurate reports preserve vagueness to noting that in *some* cases they must – the suggested argument still stands.

How might one support the weakened premise? To begin with, note that it's unclear whether, for any assertion entered using a vague expression, there will always exist even a *candidate* same-saying complement *devoid* of vagueness. It was noted, after all, that vagueness is a pervasive phenomenon. The difficulty here is perhaps best seen by trying oneself to formulate precise replacements for a variety of cases. Consider, for example: John is reclining beside the red table. How might one report in precise terms an assertion entered via an utterance of this multiply vague sentence? What should replace the vague 'table,' for instance?

In reply, one would like a general answer to such questions, or at least a general reason for thinking that an answer could be given in each particular case. Might the opponent of the (revised) suggested argument advert here to the supervenience of the vague on the precise? Perhaps a candidate precise complement clause can always be found in a base claim that would necessitate what was vaguely asserted.¹⁶ For all that's been said, however, the determining base sentence might involve concepts rather dissimilar to those deployed by the original speaker. What if the supervenience base must be described in the language of physics?¹⁷ It might seem that the precise replace-

15 One might object that 'weighs over 220 pounds' (even adding: as used in that context) remains vague, at least to the extent that we could apply it. Let's let this worry pass. I return in a moment to the difficulty of finding precise replacements.

16 If the vague assertion is false, one might take the modally "closest" base claim that *would* necessitate it.

17 Perhaps not the language of *current* physics, which is not obviously devoid of vagueness.

ment for 'John is reclining beside the red table' would be too recondite for anyone reasonably to consider the report true. Mere supervenience doesn't yet assure us that the candidates thereby produced will enable reports that same-say the vague sentence originally uttered, even if same-saying is relatively undemanding.

A better reply might run as follows. One demonstrates that an expression is vague by describing a sorites series for it along some dimension. Once such a description is given, it is then always possible to introduce a sharp *ersatz* by specifying a complete sharpening of the expression along that dimension. So, for any expression whose vagueness we can in principle demonstrate, we can in principle introduce a sharp replacement for it. If such sharpened replacements are arguably sufficiently similar in content to the vague originals to satisfy the demands of same-saying, then we can always accurately report an assertion entered using vague language via a precise complement clause.

There is a problem, however. What if there are vague expressions that are *multi-dimensionally* vague? Then it is not clear that we could stipulate a sharp cut-off for each dimension along which a sorites series could be generated. Obviously, no problem is posed by an expression that is vague along just a *few* dimensions. But consider 'is a table.' Its vagueness is often demonstrated by a sorites of "decomposition."¹⁸ One imagines repeatedly removing *in some set order* a small bit of the matter that constitutes the table. But there are *many* such orders one could use, with no grounds to think that it would be reasonable to stipulate that one stop, no matter the order, after the same number of removals. Again, it has been suggested that some expressions – perhaps 'nice', 'intelligent' – are *indefinitely* multi-dimensionally vague.¹⁹

Suppose we were to waive this last worry and, further, grant that precise replacements generated in this fashion satisfy the demands of same-saying. Then it would seem that even the weakened crucial premise could be rejected. There is another revision to the suggested argument, however, that would nonetheless nullify the line of resistance we've been exploring. Resources remain to defenders of the suggested argument not willing to press these worries.

It was noted that 'same-says' is often held to be context-sensitive, that what counts as a relevant similarity may vary from one conversational setting to another. If so, and if similarity as to vagueness/precision is among the features whose relevance can shift, then whether the precise replacements same-say the original vague sentences may likewise be context-sensitive. Suppose

18 See Peter Unger (1979: 236-242).

19 See, for example, Rosanna Keefe (2000: 12 and 95).

then that the defender of the suggested argument grants – even if only for the sake of argument – that *at least in some contexts* the standards for same-saying²⁰ are sufficiently undemanding that ‘Bob weighs over 220 pounds’ counts as relevantly similar to ‘Bob is heavy.’ Suppose she grants further that, for *any* assertion entered using vague language, there is at least *one* context such that by its standards for same-saying the assertion can be reported via a precise complement clause. Indeed, suppose she even grants that there exists a context in which *any* assertion can be reported without using vague language. Would it then follow that the truths about what people say can be reported in precise language?

Well, that question deploys the context-sensitive expression ‘says’.²¹ So, our answer will depend on what ‘says’ happens to express as used there – that is, on what standards for same-saying are in play. In other words, insofar as ‘says’ is context-sensitive, so is the sentence ‘not all truths about what someone says using vague language can be stated using precise language.’

Now, suppose that, in addition to what was just granted, it’s *also* the case that there is a context sufficiently demanding with respect to same-saying such that in it *no* assertion entered using vague language could be accurately reported via a precise complement clause. This seems a reasonable supposition: it’s hard to see what could render *illegitimate* conversational contexts that, for one reason or another, rendered this a relevant similarity. But then we can introduce by stipulation a new term ‘same-says’ that context-*insensitively* expresses the relation ‘same-says’ does in that context; and we can introduce ‘says+’ to express (context-insensitively) the relation in which someone stands to a sentence that same-says+ the sentence the person actually assertorically uttered.²² There would then be truths about what people

20 That is: the standards for the relation that ‘same-says’ expresses in those contexts.

21 I am assuming that the context-sensitivity of ‘relevantly similar’ and of ‘same-says’ in the statement and explanation of the truth-conditions of indirect speech reports arise from the context-sensitivity of ‘says.’

22 It’s a consequence of an approach to vagueness that I have explored elsewhere that vague expressions are context-sensitive in such a manner that one cannot stipulatively introduce a context-*insensitive* expression that expresses what the vague expression expressed on some particular occasion of utterance. If ‘says’ is vague, and if this approach to vagueness is correct, then the move suggested above is not available. The approach to vagueness that has this consequence is hardly uncontroversial, however. In addition, I will mention below the possibility of replacing vague ‘says’ with a sharpened *ersatz*. One could then introduce ‘says+’ to express context-*insensitively* what this sharp *ersatz* expresses in particularly demanding contexts. (The controversial approach to vagueness is sketched in Steven Gross (2001: Chapter IV; and (2000). The consequence mentioned above is indicated in Gross (Forthcoming), and more fully discussed in unpublished work.

say⁺ that cannot be stated using precise language – viz., what they say⁺ by using vague language. So, it seems that the suggested argument goes through after all, once it's been properly modified: one must replace context-sensitive 'says' with a term that context-*ins*sensitively expresses what 'says' expresses in contexts in which "reproducing" vagueness matters for what counts in such contexts as same-saying. And so it seems that not all truths can be stated using precise language.

Why the hedging "it seems"? Because there is a complication to note. If one holds that 'says' is in this way context-sensitive, one might find it difficult to deny that 'states' is likewise context-sensitive. But then so is the sentence 'all true indirect speech reports can be stated using precise language' (as well as, of course, 'all truths can be stated using precise language'). If we are unclear what the contextually relevant standards are for having *stated* a particular truth, then we are unclear what claim the suggested argument is meant to deny. Once the suggested argument is formulated in terms of 'says⁺,' however, it seems charitable to assume that the standards for having stated a particular truth are likewise fairly demanding: perhaps we might even make this explicit by using 'states⁺.' With the argument and its conclusion so understood, this first line of resistance can thus itself be resisted.

V. Second Reply

Sententialism also opens up a second line of resistance to the suggested argument. The suggested argument would have it that not all truths can be stated using precise language, since (at least some) truths concerning assertions entered using vague language themselves must be stated using vague language.²³ But does the mere appearance of a vague expression in an indirect speech report's embedded complement clause constitute *use*? It's not clear that it does, according to sententialism. If it doesn't, then the suggested argument fails to establish its conclusion.

It is often suggested that sententialism in effect assimilates indirect speech reports to direct speech reports: sententialism can be viewed as treating indirect speech reports as akin to a kind of quotation. As we saw, this assimilation isn't complete, since it is required of indirect speech reports only that the embedded material be sufficiently similar to the sentence actually

23 The qualification "at least some" is inserted in light of the previous discussion. I'll henceforth omit such qualifications, considering them understood.

uttered, not that it be identical.²⁴ But it might be suggested that the assimilation is sufficient to raise the question of whether in the matter of *use* indirect speech reports are on all fours with direct speech reports. Perhaps not all kinds of quotation exclude use, but arguably direct speech reports – S says “P” – paradigmatically do.

What is needed to take this further is some criterion of use. Use is often contrasted with mention; so, it might be thought that an independent grip on mention might supply an account of use. Suppose an expression is mentioned if it is referred to.²⁵ A used expression would then be one that occurs without being referred to. But an expression can be *both* used and mentioned, as in ‘Giorgione is so-called because of his size.’²⁶ Use at best contrasts with *mere* mention, and there’s no reason to think an independent explication of that – one that doesn’t appeal to the expression’s not being *used* – would be any easier to obtain than one of use itself.²⁷

If what’s required to exclude expressions from use is the explicit occurrence in surface structure of surrounding quotation marks, then vague expressions are indeed used in indirect reports. But, even putting aside cases of mixed quotation in which it appears that an expression inside quotes is both used and mentioned,²⁸ this seems at best a superficial indication of use. Spoken, as opposed to written, language typically has no explicit “non-use” markers (unless one includes such accompanying gestures as scratching the air with two fingers). If one’s impressed by the assimilation sententialism suggests, then, absent some more fundamental understanding of what they are supposed to indicate, one will see whatever distinction explicit quotation marks mark as within the realm of the mentioned.

The use/mention distinction is sometimes explicated by reference to the principle of semantic innocence. According to this principle, an expression retains its normal semantic properties no matter the linguistic context in

24 Actually, even direct speech reports arguably only require sufficient similarity, with context-sensitive standards for similarity: for example, in some contexts it might be required that phonological features be “reproduced,” in others not. So, it would perhaps be more accurate to say that the difference between direct and indirect speech reports consists in the *kind* of similarity required.

25 Perhaps an expression can be mentioned without being referred to – for example, by validating an existentially quantified claim. Perhaps an expression is mentioned if it’s what a sentence is “about.”

26 See W. v. O. Quine (1960: 153).

27 I say “at best” to allow for the possibility of occurrences that are neither used *nor* mentioned.

28 Consider Davidson’s well-known example: Quine says that quotation “has a certain anomalous feature.” See Davidson (1979: 27-40).

which it occurs. This principle can seem to be violated, however, in some linguistic contexts, for example in quotational contexts. It can seem, for example, that in the sentence “‘cats’ has four letters,” the term ‘cats’ lacks its normal semantic property of denoting cats. (If inter-substitutability *salva veritate* with co-denoting expressions is considered a normal semantic property, or something that follows from them, then one can point here to its violation relative to ‘domestic felines.’) One might then distinguish uses of an expression according to whether semantic innocence is maintained. A defender of the suggested argument who explicated use in this way would then need to show that embedded expressions in indirect speech reports retain their normal semantic properties.

How would such a criterion be applied in the setting of sententialism? Suppose one sees the semantic properties of expressions as being given by a neo-Davidsonian truth-conditional semantic theory. Such theories consist of a finite number of axioms and production rules, from which can be derived theorems stating the truth-conditions for each sentence in the target language. A neo-Davidsonian about semantics needn’t be in particular a sententialist about the semantics of indirect speech reports; she needn’t think that the relevant theorems will assign truth-conditions like those specified above. But I *am* supposing that our sententialist is a neo-Davidsonian.

It is not obvious how, in such a setting, one might argue that an occurrence of an expression violates semantic innocence by failing to retain its normal semantic properties. Let’s first put to one side the case of lexical ambiguity. Orthographically similar expressions can of course diverge in their contributions to semantic content – a phenomenon that could appear to yield cases of *one* term failing to retain its normal semantic properties in certain linguistic contexts. But if we can trace back the apparent divergence to distinct lexical axioms, then we have mere lexical ambiguity, not a violation of innocence.

What if a lexical axiom assigns semantic properties to an expression as a function of the linguistic context in which it occurs? The expression is not lexically ambiguous, because there is but one axiom for it. But it seems that its semantic properties differ in different linguistic contexts. Do they? Suppose the expression is a noun whose axiom says that it refers to A, if the expression is immediately preceded by adjective X, and to B otherwise.²⁹ Still, this semantic specification is true (supposing it is) no matter what pre-

29 Perhaps such an axiom distinguishing multiple cases could instead be replaced by multiple axioms, each utilizing a distinct valuation-function with appropriate restrictions for the invocation. See Richard Larson and Gabriel Segal (1995: 436).

cedes the expression. In this sense, the expression retains its semantic properties wherever it occurs, and so innocence is upheld.

It might be reasonably suggested, nonetheless, that it's in the spirit of the principle of semantic innocence to consider this a violation – at least, in the supposed case, if either A or B could be designated the *normal* referent. Conceding this, however, has upshot for matters at hand only if the semantics of *direct* speech reports – our paradigm of *non-use* – violate innocence in this way. For, if they don't, then either expressions embedded in the complement clauses of direct speech reports *are* used, or the semantics of direct speech reports must violate innocence in some *other* way. The former would provide sufficient reason to reject an explication of use in terms of innocence; the latter, given the sententialist's proposed assimilation of indirect to direct speech, would direct our attention to this *other* way of violating innocence.

So, does the semantics of direct speech reports violate innocence in this way? It's by no means clear that it does. Theorems to the effect that 'S said "P"' is true iff S said 'P' can be generated without having to introduce lexical axioms in violation of innocence. Here's one possibility. Suppose the quotation marks have no *semantic* function, but rather serve the pragmatic function of instituting particularly demanding standards for same-saying. Then nothing in the syntactical representation of the report that is fed into the semantics will correspond to the surface quotations marks: one will have a noun, a verb, and a sentence with the syntactic structure $[_S [_N S] [_{VP} [_V \text{said}] [_S P]]]$. Suppose an ordered pair $\langle x, y \rangle$ satisfies 'said' iff x said y; and x satisfies a verb phrase consisting of a verb followed by a sentence iff, for some y, $\langle x, y \rangle$ satisfies the verb and y same-says 'P'.³⁰ This assignment of LF (the syntactic representation relevant to the assignment of truth-conditions), together with these axioms, generate the target theorems.³¹

Suppose, then, that we must either locate the semantics of direct speech reports' violation of innocence elsewhere or abandon the attempt to explicate use via innocence. The only place left to look for a violation of innocence, however, is in the axioms for determining the semantic properties of

30 I adapt Larson and Segal (420). The *adaptation* consists in the remark about the pragmatic function of quotation marks. Otherwise, this is their rendering of a sententialist approach to *indirect* speech reports. They themselves reject such an approach, however, in favor of an "interpreted logical form" approach. See below.

31 Obviously, it would take much work to *defend* this proposal. Note, by the way, that Davidson's own version of sententialism, according to which the quoted material doesn't even appear in LF (similarly for the complement clause of indirect reports), also does not require the introduction of special lexical axioms. The defender of Davidson's approach might be tempted to explicate use in terms of occurrence in LF.

syntactically complex expressions from their constituents. But it is unclear how they could give rise to a violation of innocence, since these axioms don't have the power to reassign semantic properties to the *constituents*. At best, they could assign differing semantic properties to the complex expressions themselves as a function of the larger linguistic contexts in which they could be embedded, just as we noted with lexical axioms. In any event, the sketch of a semantics for direct speech reports given above involves no such thing. We have thus failed to locate a way innocence would be violated that places direct speech reports properly on the non-use side.

The discussion, however, suggests a better way of explicating use. Arguably, what distinguishes occurrences in which an expression is not used is not a *difference* in the expression's semantic properties, but rather their *irrelevance*. When an expression is merely mentioned, the expression may retain its semantic properties, but those properties are *inert*: they don't contribute to the determination of the truth-conditions of the sentence in which they occur. This is captured by the just proposed derivation of truth-conditions for direct speech reports: note that, in deriving the truth conditions for sentences of the form 'S said "P,"' one nowhere needs to invoke the axioms for the constituents of 'P,' since one nowhere needs to assign a semantic value to 'P' itself. Suppose, then, that an expression is *used* iff a derivation of the truth-conditions of the sentence in which the expression occurs must assign the expression a semantic value. This explication of use properly sorts the complements of direct speech reports into the category of non-use.

More importantly for us, however, is that, given sententialism, it also sorts the occurrence of an expression in the complement clause of an indirect speech report – including an occurrence of a *vague* expression – into the category of non-use. For observe that the semantics proposed above for *direct* speech reports works equally well (*sans* the claim about the pragmatics of quotation marks) for *indirect* speech reports.³² So, even if it's necessary that

32 Again, this goes for Davidson's version of sententialism as well. Note, further, that one gets a similar result for a *version* of the "interpreted logical form" approach to indirect speech reports. A sentence's logical form, on this usage, is the syntactic representation of a sentence for which one specifies its truth-conditions. An *interpreted* logical form is a logical form with the appropriate semantic value specified at each node. On the interpreted logical form approach, an indirect speech report is true iff the speaker said something expressed by a certain interpreted logical form – viz., that of the embedded sentence in the report. In Larson and Segal's presentation, the final step of the derivation of truth-conditions for indirect speech reports involves applying the algorithm for generating interpreted logical forms in order to substitute the embedded clause's interpreted logical form for what's in effect the definite description "the interpreted logical form of 'P'" (compare the truth-conditions just given). (See Larson and Segal (446).) Applying

a vague expression *occur* in the complement clause of a true indirect speech report of an assertion entered using vague language, it hasn't yet been shown that such a report must *use* vague language; and so it hasn't yet been shown that not all truths can be stated *using* precise language.

VI. Concluding Remark

Even if the (revised) *suggested argument* doesn't establish that not all true indirect speech reports can be stated using only precise language, it may yet be the case. Perhaps 'says' ('says+') is vague—because 'same-says' ('same-says+') is vague, or because there are borderline cases of uttering *assertorically*, or even of *uttering* (suppose you barely perceptibly mumble to yourself something approximating 'P'). On the other hand, if its vagueness isn't indefinitely multi-dimensional, then maybe 'says' ('says+') could be replaced by a sharp *ersatz* in the manner discussed above. In any event, the suggested argument concerned only vague terms occurring in the complement clause.

And even if all true indirect speech reports *could* be stated using precise language, it of course wouldn't follow that *all* truths could be. I earlier indicated my sympathy with the thought that there are truths about vague *expressions* that can only be stated using vague language.

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this algorithm involves invoking the axioms for constituents of 'P' in order to assign semantic values to the logical form's nodes. *If* one were to *omit* this last step from one's derivation of the truth-conditions for indirect speech reports (which is not to say one couldn't carry out this inference *extrasemantically*), then the embedded clause's constituent expressions would not count as used, according to the above proposal.

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