

QUINE LECTURE 2

1. One way to reach the thesis of inscrutability of reference is via consideration of the radical translator's procedure. We have introduced a notion of stimulus meaning. This notion has a variably close relation to meaning itself: what it depends on is what kind of sentence it is being applied to.
2. An occasion sentence is one that depends for its assent or dissent upon prompting by some immediately preceding stimulation. 'Gavagai!' is an occasion sentence of the native language, as is 'Rabbit!' or 'There's a rabbit!' in English. But so too is 'That's a man', 'That's a bachelor' and 'That's my brother'. Standing sentences do not so depend: assent or dissent to them is independent of the immediately preceding stimulation (over a small enough time). Thus e.g. ' $2 + 2 = 4$ ' is a standing sentence as are 'Dogs bark' and 'Today is Monday'. Note that in at least the last two cases assent or dissent *can* be prompted by preceding stimulations; the point is only that they are not necessary.
3. Now notice that for many occasion sentences and for most if not all standing sentences the stimulus meaning can vary quite sharply between speakers of whom we should intuitively say that they mean the same by that sentence. Thus you and I might disagree over our assent to the occasion sentence 'That's a bachelor' when subjected to a stimulation caused by visual exposure to some bachelor whom you know personally and I do not. Equally you and I might disagree over the standing sentence 'Neutrinos have mass' given *any* stimulation. This illustrates the way in which collateral information can intrude upon stimulus meaning in way that it does not (intuitively) intrude upon 'meaning'; it also hints at the point that 'Two Dogmas' also suggests: that there is no information-free precipitate of pure meaning that we can separate from other elements of the stimulus meaning of a sentence (WO s9).
4. Now amongst occasion sentences Quine distinguishes those that are more and those that are less *observational*. The expression 'observation sentence' has meant various things in Quine's writings; but here we can say that a sentence is observational to the extent that different speakers agree on its stimulus meaning. Thus 'Red!' is highly observational because just about any two English-speakers given the same (distal) stimuli would agree in assenting or agree in dissenting. 'Bachelor!' is highly *non-observational* because of the widespread intersubjective disagreement in its stimulus meaning that I noted at 3 above. And now the point is that stimulus meaning is a good approximation to meaning intuitively conceived only for the highly *observational* end of a language: everywhere else collateral information, which varies between speakers, generates intersubjective differences in stimulus meanings.
5. It is a consequence of this that stimulus meaning of a sentence does not supervene on the reference of its terms. Inscrutability of reference rests on the converse of this point: sentences can be alike in stimulus meaning whilst

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containing terms of varying reference. We have got to the point where the radical interpreter is able to identify stimulus meanings for sentences of the native language: 'Gavagai' is thus stimulus-synonymous with e.g. 'Rabbit!' Now you might think that this gives us a clue as to the *reference* of the term 'gavagai'. Can we not infer that it is a general term referring to (containing in its extension just) rabbits?

6. The burden of *WO 12* is that this is not so. For consider: when you point to a rabbit you point to a temporal stage of a rabbit, and when you point to a rabbit you point to a component part of the scattered mass of rabbit. So the *stimulus meaning* of "Gavagai" is the same as that of (i) 'Rabbit!' (ii) 'Rabbit-stage!' (iii) 'Leporiform part of the scattered totality of rabbit!' (iv) 'Integral rabbit-part!' (v) the feature-placing 'Rabbiteth!' All of (i)-(v) have the same stimulus meanings. Hence nothing in the stimulus meaning of the sentence 'Gavagai!' by itself gives us any more reason to think that 'gavagai' refers to rabbits than that it refers to rabbit stages (in which case its extension is quite a different set).
7. Now you might say that we can settle this matter by asking the native such questions as 'Is this gavagai the same as that one?' in appropriate circumstances. But asking him that question will not do: we need to ask him the *translation* of that sentence. But therein lies the difficulty: we need already to have mastered the native's term for numerical (why not qualitative?) identity before we can even ask this: let us suppose we have settled on: 'Ig hoc gavagai blub hic gavagai?' Suppose then that when two rabbits pass by the native replies 'yok' (no); but when one rabbit happens by twice he replies 'evet' (yes).
8. But now the difficulty should be evident, for it looks as if we can do one of two things: *either* we can translate 'blub' as identity and say that 'gavagai' refers to rabbits, *or* we can say that 'blub' holds between *two* objects if they are both stages of the same rabbit, and that 'gavagai' refers to rabbit *stages*. Both strategies are compatible with the data that we have: and it is Quine's view that there is *nothing* to choose between them.
9. For a real life example: consider Japanese numerical classifiers. We may write the Japanese for 'Five oxen' as 'A B C' where 'A' is a numeral, 'B' is a classifier and 'C' is a term corresponding to 'oxen'. Now we can understand the classifier as going with 'A' or as going with 'C': in the former case 'C' is an individuating predicate referring to many oxen; in the latter case it is a singular term referring to a single object, the 'unindividuated totality of beef on the hoof'. Again the point is not that we can never know the answer; the point is that the choice is unreal. (OR: 35-7)