IS THERE SUCH THING AS A LANGUAGE?

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To advance models tends to provoke sketchy ways of thinking. However, one must not forget that simplification is a legitimate and often very useful maneuver. I shall propose three models intended to reconstruct broadly what we mean by a language or, perhaps better —in order to avoid begging the question— what we understand by verbal communication, what elements take part in it, and what is needed in order to engage in a verbal exchange. My discussion will be revolving around Davidson's assertion "there is no such thing as a language", found in his paper "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs".[1]

1. *A Traditional Proposal for Understanding How We Communicate and What Is a Language*

Let us think about this model as issuing from the trite expression "language is a code". A code, such as Braille or

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[1] In *Truth and Interpretation. Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, edited by Ernest LePore, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1986, pp. 433-446. This volume includes two comments on Davidson's paper: Ian Hacking, "The Parody of Conversation", pp. 447–458, and Michael Dummett, " 'A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs': Some Comments on Davidson and Hacking", pp. 459–476.

the Morse code, is a system of rules. Thus, if language is a code, having a language, being able to assert and understand an infinite set of sentences is, then, to follow, with a certain amount of correction, the rules of the code (to *know how* to speak according to those rules). Therefore, to communicate in Spanish, English or French amounts to the possession by the speaker of a "competence" in the phonological, syntactical, and semantical rules which constitute the "Spanish", "English", or "French" systems. To emit a message and to understand a message are codification and decodification processes performed by following the rules of a language.

Or, as some linguists point out, one must discriminate between "language" and "speech": the many vicissitudes of speech are nothing but a part of the many possibilities of language.

Thus, a language may be conceived as a class of abstract objects. At any rate, the code or language determines speech, or at least literal speech. Accordingly, I shall talk about "communicative determinism" in relation to this first model of language: speakers and their hearers share a system of rules, a language, which determines the utterance and understanding of their different literal sentences. This concept of language permits us to characterize model 1 as a form of "Platonism".

So, according to model 1, there are, for example, more or less precise syntactical rules, and meanings are primarily meanings of language. The term "meanings of language" implies that the words have meanings quite apart from *any* speaker. Literal meanings of words are therefore as stable and objective as language.

Thus, when a hearer understands or grasps the literal meanings of words, she decodes the "modes of presentation" of the referents articulated by the speaker by means

of a certain code. That is why understanding is a virtually automatic "blind" activity.

There are of course together with the "straight" actualizations of the code many "deviated" actualizations: metaphors and other tropes, ironical remarks, jokes, . . . or mere idiosyncratical uses of language which we commonly don't have to understand but to interpret. Interpretation constitutes a more or less reflexive activity, secondary in relation to understanding. But how can this be so? In a straight actualization, what the words say, their literal meanings, the meanings of speech, coincide with what the speaker says; whereas in deviant actualizations those meanings do not coincide and may even differ in a decisive manner. In other words, while interpreting the meanings of speech, or of the speaker, those meanings do not coincide with the meanings of language. Still, although the meanings of the speaker are not the same as those of language, according to model 1 those "deviant" meanings can only be interpreted bearing in mind our understanding of literal meanings.

Therefore, our knowledge of how to manipulate a code, our practical knowledge of the phonology, syntax, semantics, . . . of a language is a necessary and sufficient condition for participating in the diverse communication circuits taking place in that language.

When Davidson says that "there is no such thing as a language" he is perhaps arguing, *in the first place*, that "there is no such thing as a language" *if* we understand language as formal semantics does. Nevertheless, his assertion can have, I believe, a wider scope. And one can also think of formal semantics as one more version of model 1. Thus, maybe one can complete Davidson's assertion as follows: "there is no such thing as a language if we understand a language according to the different versions of model 1". Let me try to support such a reading.

Davidson, in his "The Social Aspect of Language",[2] —which is partly an answer and a series of clarifications to criticisms directed against "A Nice Derangement..." by Michael Dummett, among others— explicitly mentions that the concept of language he opposes is the following: "in learning a language, a person acquires the ability to operate in accord with a precise and specifiable set of syntactic and semantic rules; verbal communication depends on speaker and hearer sharing such an ability".[3]

But what Davidson has to say goes well beyond a mere denial of the different versions of model 1 or of "communicative determinism". In regard to verbal communication, he seems no to be interested in any concept of language, not even as a necessary condition of verbal communication. He seems to be stating this in the following lines: "neither *the usual concept* (... of a language) nor the philosophical concept is very important in understanding what is essential to verbal communication" (my italics).[4]

But, what is, according to Davidson, "important" to verbal communication?

2. *Davidson's Counterproposal to Model 1*

In "A Nice Derangement..." Davidson begins his discussion by considering the phenomenon of malapropism. A malapropism is a ludicrous misuse of words which produces grotesque expressions which are commonly interpreted by and even easily understood by most hearers (part of what in Mexico are called *albures* are malaprops). But how

[2] In *The Philosophy of Michael Dummett*, edited by Brian McGuinness and Gianluigi Oliveri, Synthèse Library Volume, 239, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht, 1994, pp. 1–16. Dummett's answer is in the same volume, pp. 257–267.

[3] Ibid., p. 2.

[4] Ibid.

can such "deviations" of "literal meanings" be grasped so easily? Davidson postulates the following principles:

(1) First meaning is systematic

(2) First meanings are shared

(3) First meanings are governed by learned conventions or regularities.[5]

Those who propose model 1 or communicative determinism as an account or description of communication will vindicate these principles, but they will also urge that the third principle, or rather a modification of this principle stressing "rules" over mere "regularities", is the basic one: principles 1 and 2 are thus supported and explained by the fact that communicative skills are governed by a partly innate, partly learned rule code.

Davidson by contrast wants to maintain principles 1 and 2 and drop principle 3; he wants to vindicate a systematic and shared character of language without resorting to rules of language in order to account for such character. Davidson suggests that we interpret principle 1 in the following manner: an interpreter is able to interpret her sentences or the sentences of other people on the basis of the semantic properties of the words or parts of sentences; compositional semantics is based on a recursive skill.

Davidson construes principle 2 as the demand that a systematic method of interpretation be shared. Thus, sharing the same "theories" of interpretation suffices: in interpreting a speaker, the interpreter uses her "theory", and the speaker uses the same or a similar theory in order to produce speech (speaker or hearers need not know that "theory", but only speak and understand in accordance with it). Such "theories" are divided into two classes: there are "prior" theories, i.e., stable and preceding any particular

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[5] "A Nice Derangement..."

communication, and "occasional" or passing theories. The prior theory specifies how the interpreter is *prepared* to interpret sentences, and the "occasional" or passing theory tells how she *actually* interprets those sentences.

Placing himself in the opposite pole of model 1, Davidson points out that "what must be shared for communication to succeed is the passing theory".[6]

On the other hand, Davidson expels any hope for the proponents of model 1 who seek to assimilate "prior theories" to "language":

> It is quite clear that in general the prior theory is neither shared by speaker and interpreter nor is it what we would normally call a language. For the prior theory has in it all the features special to the idiolect of the speaker that the interpreter is in a position to take into account before the utterance begins. One way to appreciate the difference between the prior theory and our idea of a person's language is to reflect on the fact that an interpreter must be expected to have quite different prior theories for different speakers.[7]

Therefore, Davidson's conclusion, however perverse it may seem, is by no means an unexpected one: "There is no such thing as a language."[8]

But, isn't this perverseness mitigated if we take into account that the *complete* conclusion as Davidson formulates it at this moment is far more unassuming, namely, "There is no such thing as a language, not if language is anything like what many philosophers and linguists have supposed?"

According to *my* proposal to complete this sentence mentioned above, I'm not sure whether the perverseness would be completely mitigated. For not only most of the

[6] Ibid., p. 442.
[7] Ibid., p. 443.
[8] Ibid., p. 446.

readers have tended to forget the restriction, but Davidson himself seems sometimes to forget it. Or am I completely wrong? Let us at least remember, among many other assertions, the following lines, quoted earlier: "neither the usual concept (... of a language) nor the philosophical concept is very important in understanding what is essential to verbal communication".

Anyhow, I shall refer to Davidson's proposal as a second model of communication. According to this model there is no such thing, then, as a set of rules neither phonological, nor syntactical nor semantical —which must constitutively intervene in communication. There is no "shared language":

> I argued that sharing such a previously mastered ability was neither necessary nor sufficient for succesful communication. I held (and hold) that the linguistic skills people typically bring to conversational occasions can and do differ considerably, but mutual understanding is achieved through the exercise of imagination, appeal to general knowledge of the world, and awareness of human interests and attitudes.[9]

So Davidson does not include the practical knowledge of language —be it the "usual concept" of language or one of the philosophical versions of model 1— among the skills by means of which we achieve "mutual understanding". As opposed to model 1, we may call the posture represented by model 2 "communicative indeterminism": each interpreter has to interpret speakers in a "radical way", from case to case, with the help from an occasional theory and without any stable aid from a language. Thus, the concept of a language is reduced, at best, to a grouping of idiolects.

Together with the existence of idiolects and the profusion of "deviant" language, Davidson notices another sup-

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[9] "The Social Aspect...", p. 2.

port for model 2 in the fact that two people can communicate to each other in different languages; for instance, one speaks in English and the other answers in Spanish. And communication in such cases can be carried out fluently. (From the viewpoint of model 1 this fact is construed differently: both speakers have at their disposal the codes of both languages, only that their degrees of competence differ; a subject that speaks and answers in a language is said to have an active competence in that language; a subject that can only understand it has a passive competence.)

3. *On Model 3: An Alternative to Models 1 and 2*

Our third model of communicative processes somehow rescues the concept of a code. However, in relation to this concept one doesn't think, as in model 1, in such examples as Braille or the Morse code, but in the use of the word in expressions like "penal code" or "civil code". In this sense a code is a "deposit" of more or less precise rules, some of which are very precise, while others are open to the sensible interpretations of judges. Codes such as these are actually necessary elements for the constitution of legal institutions, but they do not determine directly the application of the law. The use of these codes, in its turn, makes up a basic tradition of those institutions: a tradition of judicial sentences is formed by a background of other judicial sentences as well as certain customs. Thus, one finds what might be called —if you'll excuse the redundancy— a "traditional institution".

Taking this characterization of codes and institutions as a starting point, model 3 will be an attempt to approach language by drawing an analogy —but only *an analogy*— between language and a "traditional institution". What is this analogy?

Although a code does not determine without further ado the many actualizations of speech, it does underdetermine them to a lesser or greater extent. That is the reason why I'll be speaking here of a "communicative underdeterminism" in relation to model 3. But, why should one insist in retaining from the viewpoint of model 3 a certain idea of code, on defending the idea that there is a language as something analogous to a "traditional institution"?

Let us recall a number of psychological, social, and even political data which seem to speak on behalf of model 3. According to model 3 to speak a language is to "socialize" oneself in a certain institution, in a certain tradition. Symptomatically, we refer to our first language as our "*mother* tongue". As many poets have repeated, a particular language —English, Spanish, French, . . . — is a "home", a "homeland". That is why the fact of speaking a language such as English, Spanish, French, . . . seems to impregnate the entire life of an individual, it makes her be part of a certain tradition, of a certain way of feeling and believing. Surely this is not the vague and even apparently silly fact that Davidson seeks to remove.

Someone might reply: In what interesting sense of the word 'exist' does a language exist? Isn't this nothing else but a case of an illegitimate reification of certain customs? Here's a first answer to these objections, an answer that seeks to avoid the danger of breaking language into a jumble of idiolects or the commitment to any kind of Platonism (or Fregean senses): the claim that a language exists is at least at first analogous to the claim that families, universities, and armies exist, that is, in the same sense in which we say that any "traditional institution" exists. And no "traditional institution" can be reduced to the behavior of any one of its participants.

Of course, that is not to deny that what is called somehow incorrectly "deviant actualizations" —those speech

manifestations in which the meanings of the speaker (the speaker's intentions), and not the meanings of language, are prominent— actually impregnate the whole language. They certainly do. Nevertheless, however "rare" they are, from the standpoint of model 3 we are reminded that those "deviations" belong to a particular language; they are, for example, English but not Spanish "deviations". This suggests a general point: the "prior theory" which speaker and hearers bring to communication occasions is not a particular idiolect but a version of a certain language or certain languages shared by both speakers and hearers.[10] Communication is often fluent and an individual understands as a hearer the speaker(s) —and does not solve puzzles as an interpreter—, by understanding the "straight actualizations" of the shared language. In order to understand the utterances of a speaker sharing her own language, an individual does not have frequently to do very much, as a hearer, but to grasp the meanings belonging to that language and to appeal to relevant tacit knowledge, without having to make many adjustments to those meanings in relation to the beliefs, desires, feelings, . . . of the speaker. Of course we sometimes make great "adjustments", for we often "interpret", that is, sometimes we do not wholly understand the utterances and we start elaborating "theories" about what has been said, advancing hypothesis about what the speaker meant to say, and supporting those hypothesis with the attribution to the speaker of certain beliefs, desires, feelings, . . . However, all this is done in all cases pre-

[10] Sometimes Davidson seems to accept something close to this point. For instance, in his "James Joyce and Humpty Dumpty", in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, XVI, 1991, Davidson writes: "Joyce's way of resolving the tension between invention and tradition is in a way obvious; like any writer he must depend on the knowledge his readers are able to bring to his writings. Much of this knowledge is verbal of course, knowledge of what words ordinarily mean", p. 8.

supossing a language. Thus, from the standpoint of model 3, one may argue that communication is neither as smooth as model 1 seems to affirm nor as problematic as suggested by model 2. According to model 3, the life of language, just as the life of any "traditional institution", unfolds between those two conditions: smoothness and trouble.

4. *On Some Obligations that the Use of Language Seems to Imply*

Any speech act seems to imply certain obligations. For, isn't it true that in any communicative occasion speaker and hearers coordinate their communicative acts by means of certain presumptions? If so, any speaker seems to be entitled to complain if she considers that the corresponding presumption has not been fulfilled. For instance, when a speaker uses an assertion A she seems committed to fulfill such obligations as:

(a) Assertion A is intelligible.
(b) Assertion A is a true assertion.
(c) Assertion A is a relevant assertion.

If the speaker does not conform to these obligations, the hearer, as we have already pointed out, may protest. However, perhaps one may object that these obligations belong to language *as such*, let alone to *a particular* language *as such*. Perhaps they are obligations that we acquire, among many other factors, by living in a society. (Doesn't such objection belong to a "deflationary" tendency in relation to language, in some sense similar to parallel tendencies regarding truth and mind?)

In order to weaken this objection, I shall skip the obligation stated in (b), i.e., the presumption of telling the truth, and (c), and concentrate only on (a). What is, if there is such thing, the presumption of intelligibility?

When a speaker engages in a conversational occasion she must presume that her hearer understands to some extent the language she is speaking. For instance, a speaker that only speaks Spanish will not try to communicate an intricate discourse to a hearer that only speaks Chinese. The intelligibility presumption, in this sense, functions as a "pre-condition" of communication; that is why when we face, as hearers, discourses in a language we do not understand, we have the feeling of being in front of a huge and impenetrable wall.

However, once communication is in progress we do not simply neglect the intelligibility presumption. On the contrary, sometimes we wish to make sure, as speakers as well as hearers, that the intelligibility presumption is being fulfilled and that there is effective communication. Thus, regarding the intelligibility presumption we can also talk about a "continuous internal condition" of communication. What consequences may be drawn from the intelligibility presumption as a continuous internal condition?

There is a practice —explicit or implicit— held in common by all languages which consists in asking and answering questions about the meanings of words in ongoing conversations. Let us call this activity a "reconstructive cycle" of language. Here are some examples of this cycle: a child asks her mother "What does 'casserole' mean?" or, perhaps more usually, "What is a casserole?". A politician reads the following heading: "The elections will eventually take place next month", and wonders "What does 'eventually' mean in this sentence?". A pupil asks his teacher what's the meaning of the enigmatic word 'malapropism'. Notice that in all of these cases, the individual that answers:

(a) *informs* about something (norms and regularities) to the inquirer, and, to some extent,

(b) *prescribes* the knowledge of the inquirer.

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There is also in all languages a practice that can be in some sense considered as a sub-cycle of the reconstructive cycle: the *practice of correction*. Every speaker acquires the knowledge of words and sentences by being corrected when she makes mistakes, that is, when the speaker departs from the correction rules characteristic of a language. Therefore, the members of a linguistic community become subordinated to a great extent to the same rules of a public language.

But, what are the sources of normativity for the reconstructive cycle and the correction practices? In order to throw light on this matter I shall embark on a small discussion on monolingual dictionaries.

5. *The Dictionary Dilemma*

The reconstructive cycle is carried out not only by asking our parents, teachers and friends; neither the correction practices can be reduced to casual interventions. Frequently we use a more complete and less subjective tool, usually considered as the arbiter both for the reconstructive cycle and the correction practices: the monolingual dictionary.[11] The monolingual dictionary offers the information and norms we usually need in our reconstructive cycles or that we use in our daily correction practices in an articulated manner, with a certain systematic form, and no direct relation to a given circumstance. We might say that a good monolingual dictionary is, as it were, a picture of a certain language.

But what is a monolingual dictionary? Unlike multilingual dictionaries which originated from various information needs —the warrior, the merchant, and the traveler wanted to know what the others were saying, what is being said when another language is used—, the reflections on

[11] Cf. Luis Fernando Lara, *Teoría del diccionario monolingüe*, El Colegio de México, México, 1997.

language during the 16th century which yielded the first monolingual dictionaries were strongly related to the political agenda of the emerging National States. Thus, part of that legitimation was found in the fixations of norms and language pureness lexicographical ideals. Very soon many monolingual dictionaries were considered as "dictionaries of authorities": they picked up the literary presence of the past, the classical canons, and turned these models into norms for the correction of present speech. Moreover, it was commonly thought that fixing a language was a way of strengthening and lending prestige to a State. Perhaps these remarks can be construed as confering a strong support for those who argue that the obligations mentioned in 4, including the inteligibility obligation, are nothing more than general social obligations, and lack a specific linguistic character.

I do not believe that that is a completely correct conclusion. On the other hand, there is still an episode in this complex history of monolingual dictionaries which I'd like to bring forward.

I will focus on only one episode in this complex story of monolingual dictionaries. Linguistics emerged on the basis of two postulates, one descriptive, the other explanatory. Unlike rhetoric, linguistics was never intended to teach people to talk or to evalute speech and writing. Its purpose was the description of the various forms of speech as well as the linguistic structures —phonological, syntactical, semantical, and pragmatic— that make possible those speech forms. It would seem to follow from this that a dictionary with linguistic pretensions —a naturalized dictionary— would have to be only a descriptive dictionary. In an extreme case, a linguistic dictionary would include only statistics on phonological, syntactical, and semantical regularities, but not any rules. That is precisely the orientation adopted by the third edition of the *Webster's New*

International Dictionary. Of course the alarm of all kinds of normativists was swift to emerge.

From this story I intend to reconstruct what I will call the "dictionary dilemma": either a dictionary is normative and so does not pick up accurately the real language of people, or it accurately articulates the language of people but drops, by the same token, its normative function.

Above all I would like to point out that the dictionary dilemma is a particular case of the more general dilemma of epistemology: either the theory of knowledge is normative and tells us what kinds of knowledge are justified and how they are justified, or it is a completely naturalized, descriptive theory. But this is not the place to discuss the general dilemma; I will concentrate only on the more particular dictionary dilemma.

I wish to advance the following proposal: a monolingual dictionary must have a normative character, on pain of not being able to satisfy the expectations —the needs— of those who consult it. A dictionary without a normative import is useless as a tool for the reconstructive cycle and the practice of correction. But that normativity does not have to come *a priori* from a certain literary-political tradition used to legitimate one or several States. Normativity may rather originate in our need of understanding manifest in the "democratic" bustle of ordinary language and therefore in the institutionalization of the reconstructive cycle and the correction practices as familiar and indispensable procedures.

Maybe all what has been advanced could help to dissolve the dictionary dilemma: a good dictionary, we might say, has a normative character, but such normativity does not have to be the normativity imposed by a dogmatic literary-political judge; it may rather be a product of a social shared memory, directed towards understanding and by understanding, providing norms for history but also evolving

in history.[12] The dictionary dilemma is thus dissolved in a spiral of facts and norms, if one maintains a moderate naturalism.

A monolingual dictionary is accordingly a picture of a certain language insofar as it is a picture of a certain social memory. This social memory is a condition both for the possibility of our mutual understanding and of some of our obligations. But now it's time to ask: in what sense do these data support any one of the models over the others?

6. *Model 3: Conceiving Language Provisionally As Analogous to a "Traditional Institution"*

The data gathered so far seem to favor model 3. On the one hand, model 1 overlooks the fact that there is no language without a history and that any verbal communication is totally impregnated by "deviations" and other enigmas. Thus, from the standpoint of models 2 and 3, one must insist, against model 1, on the adventures implied by any act of interpreting. Taking into account these —sometimes very modest, sometimes highly risky— adventures leads us to deny there is something like an algorithm for interpretation; in other words, it leads us to reject the precious idea of an "interpreting machine". And even if we acknowledge the distinction between understanding and interpreting, we must also oppose the idea of an "understanding machine". Thus, neither understanding nor interpreting —two ordinary words which often refer to both poles of a continuum— can be automatic, blind activities. I cannot

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[12] In "James Joyce and..." Davidson points out: "There is a tension between the thought that what a speaker intends by what he says determines what he means and the thought that what a speaker means depends on the history of the uses to which the language has been put in the past", p. 1. With the term "social memory" I meant that "history of the uses to which the language has been put in the past".

understand someone who speaks to me in English about carpentry, cooking, or nuclear theory, if I do not know some English, and something about carpentry, cooking, or nuclear theory.

On the other hand, granting that every speech act implies certain obligations analogous to the obligations of those who participate in the other "traditional institutions" seems to oppose model 2 and to offer direct support to model 3. And when a speaker comes across a language she does not understand at all, the feeling of facing a huge and impenetrable wall —a consequence of her ignorance of a particular fragment of that social memory— also seems to go directly against model 2 and to support the view of language as an institution in which one inevitably has to "socialize". Furthermore, the fact that the participants of the various verbal communication occasions are constantly applying correction practices and reconstructive cycles indicates to what extent the participants in a verbal communication presume there is something like a language that can be known and that somehow governs their verbal exchanges (a language that is stable enough to resemble in many ways a traditional institution, in spite of its constant changes and diversification in idiolects). John McDowell seems to be making a point in a more or less similar direction when he indicates, towards the end of *Mind and World*:

> Dummett focuses on two "principal functions" of language; as "instrument of communication" and as "vehicle of thought". His conclusion is that we should take neither of them to be primary. But that is because he thinks those functions of language are both fundamental. In the picture I am suggesting, they are secondary. The feature of language that really matters is rather this: that a natural language, the sort of language into which human beings are first initiat-

ed, serves as a repository of tradition, a store of historically accumulated wisdom about what is a reason for what.[13]

So is there such thing as a language? I believe one must answer in the affirmative on the basis of model 3. However, there remains one point to be examined: I have said that a language such as English, Spanish, French,... can be thought of provisionally, from the standpoint of model 3, as analogous to a "traditional institution", but *not* that language is one of those "traditional institutions". Let me try to explain this restriction.

7. *Language, a "Natural Institution"*

What prevents me from simply equating a language to a "traditional institution" is that whereas institutions such as the family, armies, universities,... depend on a tradition and we can picture any tradition without them, we cannot, on the other hand, conceive any tradition, any kind of human life, without a language. Regarding this matter, let us remember that language has been characterized as an "organ", a "mental organ".[14] And surely certain properties of a language are analogous to an organ. But there are also great differences between being able to see or hear and being able to tell someone else that I love to see on the table a vase with yellow flowers and to listen to a bee flying over

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[13] *Mind and World*, Harvard University Press, London, 1994, pp. 125–126.

[14] Noam Chomsky, *Rules and Representations*, 1980, Columbia University Press, New York, pp. 138ff. We must not ignore in this reference that Chomsky also wants to get rid of the ordinary concept of language: "language has no objective existence apart from its mental representation", *Language and Mind*, 1972, Harcourt Brace Javanovich, p. 169. However, Chomsky and Davidson's premises are opposing. Language is for Chomsky a part of the speaker's mind/brain. For Davidson, on the other hand, language is primarily communication, the product of radical interpretations.

those flowers because all that reminds me of a painting of a certain dutch artist. In order to accomplish this kind of verbal communication the natural "organ" must have been "socialized" in advance in an institution: I must participate in a certain social memory.

Thus model 3 allows us to speak about a language, if you'll permit me the oxymoron, as a "natural institution": part of what we call language is analogous to an organ because it is genetically programmed —it is a fragment of our natural outfit, though I do not want to mean by this that we are forced to posit a "language of thought", a "mentalese"— and another part of it is the result of social learning. In other words, language is partly nature and partly culture, a "second nature" (though we should be careful not to think of the relation between these different aspects in additive terms). This conclusion is not surprising at all for that is the way we human beings are.