

Chapter 2

Meaning

Abstract In this chapter I identify the conceptual tools needed to establish claims for the existence of conceptual ties, along with the principles governing the use of those tools, and present a model of conceptual analysis. I identify and justify those principles in the light of the conditions for the meaningfulness of expressions in language, which I extract from an analysis of the concept of meaning. The conclusions of this analysis are organized into a schematic model of the workings of a language. According to this model, the meaning of every word in any language is determined by its role in the systematic mapping of all possible states of affairs included in its conceptual scheme.

Keywords Conceptual analysis • Conceptual basis • Conceptual connection • Conceptual dimension • Conceptual scheme • Meaning • Meaningfulness

2.1 Introduction

Claims for the existence of conceptual connections are not rare in philosophy: the connections between ethics and happiness, self-consciousness and objectivity, mind and behavior, and countless other alleged conceptual links lie at the center of many of the most important philosophical discussions and debates. It is therefore surprising that there are no generally accepted principles for the evaluation of the claims for the existence of conceptual connections. In some instances the claim for the existence of conceptual ties between concepts is based on a specific theory of meaning, and therefore depends on the acceptability of that theory. In other

instances these claims seem to ultimately rely simply on what subjectively seems to be implied by a certain concept.¹

In this chapter I offer a general model of conceptual analysis, intended to reveal conceptual ties. A conceptual tie is defined as a connection of dependence between meaningful components of the language. For example, if the meaning of the word x (that is, the concept x) depends upon the meaning of the word y (that is, the concept y), then a conceptual scheme that does not include concept y cannot include concept x . I identify the conceptual tools needed to establish claims for the existence of conceptual ties, along with the principles governing the use of these tools, justified on the basis of a model of the working of the language.

Conceptual ties are connections of meaning. It is not necessary, however, to develop a theory of meaning in order to develop and justify the principles of conceptual analysis. These principles are identified and justified in light of constraints about meaning, that is, in light of necessary conditions and not sufficient conditions for the meaningfulness of expressions in language. These conditions are extracted from an analysis of the concept of meaning. In this analysis I rely only on the most basic and undisputed features of our language, in order to derive general principles that are not committed to any specific theory of meaning.²

In Sect. 2.2 I address the issue of meaning to create the basis for the discussion. For that purpose I present a limited analysis of the concept of meaning, in order to extract a few general, and as undisputed as possible, characteristics of meaning. In Sect. 2.3 I develop the conclusions of the previous analysis into a schematic model of the workings of a language. From that model the conditions for a word in a language to have meaning is extracted and explained. In Sect. 2.4 I develop two important concepts for the assessment of conceptual ties: Conceptual Dimension and Conceptual Basis. In Sect. 2.5 I summarize the results, paying particular

¹ The first part of Strawson's *Individuals* presents an impressive variety of techniques for revealing conceptual ties, which exemplify both types of instances. On the one hand are the claims for the existence of conceptual ties that seem to rely on verificationist assumptions, for example the analysis of the connection between the concept of self and other minds (Strawson 1959, Chap. 3. For a similar claim, see Stroud 1968). On the other hand, in Strawson's analysis of the conceptual tie that holds between space and objectivity (in which he attempts to find room for the idea of the existence of unperceived particulars, via the idea of reidentification, in a sound-world whose features provide an analogy of space), Strawson frankly admits "Some might find it less persuasive than others. I can imagine one who is not disposed to be at all persuaded by it ..." (Strawson 1959, 79), and "I do not think there is any test beyond what we find it satisfactory to say. One can certainly influence the finding by pointing to respects in which the parallel holds or fails to hold—and can also suggest improvements. But no more" (Strawson 1959, p. 81).

² My discussion assumes that we can talk about meanings, and even about meanings of individual words, and not just about the meanings of sentences. I am aware that this assumption has been famously criticized by Quine (1960, Chap. 3; 1970). I do not attempt, in the scope of this book, to confront Quine's criticism, which has itself been extensively discussed and criticized, especially with regard to its physicalist and behaviorist assumptions, some of which I also do not accept (see, for example, Chomsky 1969). My hope is that the model I present in this chapter goes some way in convincing its readers that talk about the meanings of words (and about conceptual analysis) is philosophically worthwhile.

attention to the overall conception of conceptual analysis that was developed during the course of the previous discussion.

2.2 Meaning

In what follows I limit the discussion to the use of language for description. Those who do not see the essence of language in its ability to describe, or do not think that the descriptive aspect of an expression in language exhausts its meaning, can view the present discussion as dealing with only one aspect of meaning, an aspect that can be called “descriptive meaning.”³ From this point on I shall use the term “meaning” to refer to the descriptive aspect of meaning.

In light of my interest in the descriptive aspect of language, I first turn my attention to declarative sentences, that is, sentences of language that we use to describe. From this point I simply use the term “sentence” to refer to declarative sentences. I use the term “proposition” in order to refer to the meaning of a declarative sentence, that is, the description which is expressed by this sentence. A description can be right or wrong, and whether it is right or wrong determines the truth-value of the proposition, which is true if the description is right and false if the description is wrong (other possible truth-values are of no importance for my purpose in this book). The meaning of the sentence, therefore, determines, at least partly, the truth-value of the proposition which is expressed by this sentence, and this can be said without committing ourselves to any theory of truth or meaning (truth-conditional, verificationist or any other).

I now turn my attention to the relations between a sentence and its components. I first discuss the contribution that the words in the components of a given sentence make to the meaning of that sentence, and only at a later stage will I expand the analysis to other components of the sentence. It is clear that the meaning of the words in a given sentence determine, at least partly (possibly together with other components), the meaning of the sentence in question.⁴ As it is sentences that describe reality, the descriptive aspect of the meaning of a word can only be said to be what the word in question does in fact contribute to the meaning of sentences in which it occurs. Because I am interested in the descriptive aspect of meaning, I characterize the meaning of a word (its concept) as its contribution to the meaning of sentences in which it occurs.⁵ If we take into consideration the connection

³ The distinction between descriptive meaning and other kinds of meaning can be understood as something analogous to Frege’s distinction between “sense” on the one hand and “coloring,” or “tone” on the other (Frege 1970. For detailed discussion of this distinction, see Dummett 1981, 2–3, pp. 83–89).

⁴ This thesis goes back to Frege, who based it on the ability to understand new propositions (Frege 1984, p. 390).

⁵ This consideration can be seen as supporting Frege’s famous claim: “Only in a proposition have the words really a meaning” (Frege 1980, p. 71 [Sect. 60]).

between the meaning of a sentence and the truth-value of the proposition which is expressed by this sentence, that is, that the truth-value of a proposition is, at least partly, determined by the meaning of the sentence, it is possible to describe the meaning of a word as the contribution it makes to the determination of the truth-value of propositions which are expressed by the sentences in which it occurs.⁶

With this last conclusion I conclude this part of the analysis of the concept of meaning. Although it may seem that the conclusions of this analysis are obvious truisms about the connections between the meaning of a word, the meaning of a sentence and the truth-value of a proposition, in what follows I shall try to show how much can be extracted from these humble truisms.

2.3 Meaningfulness

I now explore the implications of the conclusions reached in the previous analysis, that is, that the meaning of a word is its contribution to the meaning of sentences in which it occurs, and therefore to the determination of the truth-value of the propositions which are expressed by these sentences, in regard to the conditions for a word in language to be meaningful. I begin by exploring the conditions for a predicate to contribute to the meaning of a sentence in which it occurs.

I begin by examining the predicate “red.” This predicate occurs, for example, in the following sentence:

- (1) Dan bought a red car.

The occurrence of the predicate “red” in sentence 1 affirms (in contrast to negating) that the property “being red” is a property of the car Dan bought. Denying that property as a property of the car Dan bought preformed by adding a negation word to the predicate (and not to the whole sentence or to the verb), in the following manner:

- (2) Dan bought a car that is not red.

In contrast to these sentences, it is possible not to affirm and not to deny the property of being red as a property of the car Dan bought, namely by not including the predicate in the sentence at all⁷:

⁶ This description also fits Frege’s “sense” (Dummett 1981, p. 84). What I have written in this section is greatly influenced by Davidson’s “Truth and Meaning” (Davidson 1967).

⁷ It is a standard convention that the implication of not including a predicate in a proposition is a way of refraining from affirming or denying the property. My analysis, however, is not affected by the existence of exceptions to this convention. There is another way to refrain from affirming or denying a property, useful in propositions in which omitting the predicate will ruin the proposition, for example in the proposition “Dan’s car is red,” simply by saying “Dan’s car is red or not red.” The impossibility of omitting the predicate in a certain proposition is discussed later on.

(3) Dan bought a car.

I shall now examine the implications of the conclusions about the meaning of a word in regard to the predicate “red.” The conclusion is that the meaning of a word (the concept) is its contribution to the meaning of sentences in which it occurs, and therefore to the determination of the truth-value of the propositions which is expressed. If we look at sentences (1) and (2), in which the predicate occurs (positively or negatively), and compare them to the third sentence, in which it does not occur, it is immediately obvious that the predicate “red” contributes to the meaning, and therefore to determination of the truth-value of the propositions which are expressed: if Dan bought a blue car (and no other car), the third proposition is true. If the predicate “red” is added, as in the first sentence, the proposition which is expressed by its use is false. The second proposition is, in this example, true. That is to say, the predicate “is red” contributes to the meaning of that sentence, and that is reflected in the effect of the occurrence of the predicate in that sentence on the determination of the truth-value of the proposition which is expressed by this sentence.

I must at this point stress, that in the above analysis I have not been assuming, when talking about the effect of the occurrence of a predicate in a sentence on the truth-value of the proposition, either that the meaning of a sentence is its truth-conditions or that the meaning of a word is its reference. Because of the fact that in the analysis I discuss one word, and not two words with the same reference but each displaying a different sense, the distinction between sense and reference has no influence on the analysis. The point is that if the occurrence of a word (in this example “red”) in a sentence (“Dan bought a red car”) could not possibly affect the truth-value of that proposition, that is, its truth-value is necessarily identical to the truth-value of the proposition received when that word is omitted (“Dan bought a car”), then that word does not contribute anything to the meaning of that sentence, and that is something that must be accepted by any theory of meaning.

It is obvious that if there is no possibility of denying that property, because the denial would lead to contradiction, the occurrence of the predicate “red” could not contribute to the meaning of the sentence.⁸ If it is conceptually impossible for there to be cars that are not red (as it is conceptually impossible, for example, that there could be a widower who had never married), the first proposition, “Dan bought a red car” would follow from the third proposition, “Dan bought a car,” because it would be conceptually impossible that the first proposition be false while the third proposition is true. If it is conceptually impossible, therefore, to deny that property as a property of the car Dan bought, the addition of the predicate “red” could not possibly change the truth-value of the proposition which is expressed from “true” to “false.” It also could not change the truth-value

⁸ In the present context I relate only to the idea of conceptual necessity, and ignore the possibility of a necessity which is not based on meaning, as suggested, for example, by Kripke (1980, pp. 38–39). I do not claim that a necessity which is not conceptual is impossible. This possibility, however, is irrelevant for the present discussion.

of proposition which is expressed from “false” to “true,” because the original proposition, “Dan bought a car,” follows from the proposition “Dan bought a red car.” That means, of course, that the truth-value of the propositions “Dan bought a car” and “Dan bought a red car” would have always been the same. The occurrence of the predicate “red,” therefore, in the sentence “Dan bought a red car,” could not have any effect on the determination of the truth-value of that proposition, if it is conceptually impossible for there to be cars that were not red, and therefore that predicate could have no contribution to the meaning of that sentence. This is the case, for example, with the sentence “Dan is a widower that was married”: the predicate “was married” does not contribute to the meaning of the sentence. This is shown by the fact that the true-value of the propositions “Dan is widower” and “Dan is a widower that was married” is always the same. The reason for that is, obviously, that it is conceptually impossible that there will ever be a widower who was not married.

So far I have only discussed the occurrence of the predicate “red” in the positive. If, however, it is conceptually impossible for there to be cars that were not red, then the occurrence of the predicate “red” in the negative as well can have no contribution to make to the meaning of that sentence (“Dan bought a car that is not red”): The conceptual impossibility of cars that are not red entails that the proposition “Dan bought a car that is not red” would be necessarily false, a contradiction. That means, of course, that this sentence would not be able to describe any state of affairs. It is therefore obvious, in light in my interest in the descriptive aspect of meaning, that the occurrence of the predicate “red” in the negative, in that sentence, cannot contribute to the descriptive aspect of that sentence, because that sentence could not describe anything.⁹

I stress that I have chosen to analyze a sentence that makes two different claims (that Dan bought a car and that the car is red), in order to allow for the possibility of omitting the predicate “red” and still be left with a declarative sentence. The reason I chose that sentence is that it can be used to exemplify the possibility of a predicate occurring in a sentence that affirms something positive (affirming a property as property of something) and a sentence that affirms something in the

⁹ It is possible to follow Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, and say that contradictions (and tautologies) are senseless, but not nonsensical (Wittgenstein 1963, proposition 4.461). It is not necessary, however, to go that far, because I have accepted the idea that the ability to describe may be only one aspect of meaning. In this context it is important to mention an interesting attempt to explain Wittgenstein's claim in the *Tractatus* that philosophical propositions are nonsense (on the basis of the idea that in philosophy words are used in a manner that prevents them from contributing to the meaning of any sentence) with the help of considerations similar to those presented here (Carruthers 1989, Chap. 6). This interpretation is based on the claim that a symbol is a sign that contributes to the sense of sentences in which it occurs (based on proposition 3.31 in the *Tractatus*), and therefore its sense is dependent upon its ability to occur in sentences in which it can contribute to their sense, and this does not include, for example, contradictions and tautologies, that have no sense. The example given is of the predicate “object”: in “Mary is an object,” the predicate “is an object” makes no contribution to the sense of this sentence which has not already been made by the name “Mary” (Carruthers 1989, p. 63).

negative (denying a property), and also as not occurring in that sentence (neither affirming nor denying a property). It therefore easily allows me to examine the necessary conditions for a predicate to contribute to the meaning of a sentence in which it occurs. That said, there are sentences in which it is only possible to omit the predicate by rephrasing the sentence, for example omitting the predicate “red” in “Dan’s car is red” by rephrasing the sentence according to Russell’s theory of description, that is, as “Dan has a red car and only one car.” There are also sentences in which it seems impossible to omit the predicate at all, for example, “This is red.”¹⁰ These examples, however, do not affect the generality of the conclusion drawn from our analysis, and this conclusion applies to these sentences as well, because as I have already shown the possibility of omitting the predicate from a sentence is not what is centrally important for a predicate to contribute to the meaning of a sentence: If it were conceptually necessary for all cars to be red, then in spite of the possibility of omitting the predicate “red” from the sentence “Dan bought a red car,” the predicate “red” could make no contribution to the meaning of the sentence. In contrast, in the sentence “This is red,” the predicate “red” clearly contributes to the meaning of that sentence, even though it cannot be omitted from that sentence.

Thus, my conclusion is that *a predicate can contribute to the meaning of the sentence in which it occurs only if the property in question is a contingent property of the thing to which it is ascribed*. The connection between the meaning of the predicate, that is, its contribution to the meaning of sentences in which it occurs, and the possibilities of its occurrence in a sentence is as follows: *a predicate can contribute to the meaning of the sentence in which it occurs, in the positive or in the negative, only if its occurrence in both these ways constitutes a description of a possible state of affairs (that is, contingent propositions)*. The explanation is simple: if it is not the case that the options, both of affirming and denying the property, do describe a possible state of affairs, then in one of these options the predicate does not contribute to the meaning of that sentence. This is so because in its occurrence in the sentence in that manner, the result is a sentence that could not describe any state of affairs. Its occurrence in the other way, on the other hand, cannot contribute to the meaning of that sentence, because its occurrence in that manner designates what is conceptually necessary, which, as I have shown, renders its occurrence superfluous, and therefore it again fails to contribute to the meaning of that sentence.

Not every occurrence of a word in a sentence is meaningful, that is, not just any occurrence of a word in a sentence contributes to the meaning of that sentence. In other words, not every word is a conceptual component of the sentence in which it occurs. In order for a sign to be a conceptual component of a sentence in which it occurs it must contribute to the meaning of the sentence. A predicate can contribute to the meaning of a sentence only if both possibilities of its occurrence, that is,

¹⁰ It may be suggested that it is possible to replace the predicate “red” with a different predicate. That possibility, however, raises issues which require separate discussion, and is discussed later.

in the affirmative and the negative, describe possible states of affairs. Hence, *the meaning of a predicate is its ability, through its occurrence in the affirmative or in the negative, to determine which of the two possible states of affairs actually obtains.*

It is important to note that the point that emerges from this analysis is universal in its application, as it applies to any meaningful component of a sentence (not just to words, but even to components that are not words): the meaning of any meaningful component of a sentence can only be what the component in question contributes to the meaning of that sentence. Hence, for a component of a sentence to be able to contribute to the meaning of a sentence, the specific contribution it makes to it cannot be either necessary or result in a contradiction, that is, it must be conceptually possible both to affirm and deny the specific contribution it makes. If the specific contribution made by that component is necessary, it is superfluous; while if it results in a self-contradiction, it cannot contribute to the meaning of the sentence because a sentence which expresses a contradiction fails to describe any possible state of affairs. The meaning of any meaningful component of a sentence is, therefore, its ability to determine, simply by virtue of its occurrence in the sentence, which of these possibilities obtains.¹¹

The importance of the implications of this analysis of the concept of meaning can be shown by relating it to a map. Our conceptual scheme is a type of map that includes all possible states of affairs, just as a regular map includes all the possible locations of a traveler. The language (as a system of signs) is a systematic method of mapping all the locations, that is, the possible states of affairs. A sentence, as a structured combination of words, is a combination of coordinates which enables us to pinpoint a specific point on the map, that is, a possible state of affairs. The sentence is an attempt to describe the actual state of affairs (and is true if it does describe an actual state of affairs), just as the combination of coordinates on the map is an attempt to designate the actual location of the traveler.

The meaning of every word is thus determined by its role in this systematic mapping of all possible states of affairs: its meaning is the specific contribution it makes to the determination of the possible states of affairs pinpointed in sentences in which it occurs. Words, like the word “red” (in contrast to the word “not,” for example, whose function is analyzed later), function as coordinates on a map, and just as on a map there are different coordinates for each of the two dimensions of the area that is mapped, each word is a coordinate of a certain conceptual dimension in the conceptual space of possible states of affairs.¹² A sentence can be more detailed, that is, include coordinates of further conceptual dimensions, and thus help locate a more specific point in the conceptual space of possible state of affairs (“Dan bought a red car”), or more general (“Dan bought a car”).

¹¹ The contribution of word from different categories is not always as straightforward as in the case of predicates, as I show with regard to names. Therefore, it is not always easy to determine how to deny that contribution.

¹² The idea of “conceptual dimensions” I explain and elaborate on in [Sect. 2.4](#).

Table 2.1 The conceptual dimension
of the predicate “Greek”

Socrates is Greek
Socrates is not Greek

This analogy also throws light on the meaning of negation and its connection with the conditions for a word to contribute to the meaning of the sentence in which it occurs. The word “not” does not function as a coordinate of a specific conceptual dimension, although its meaning is determined by the function it plays in the given system of coordinates. If a word designates one of the possibilities in a conceptual dimension, then when it occurs together with a negation word, the phrase designates at least one (not necessarily a specific) of the other possibilities in this conceptual dimension: in the previous example the word “red” designates the possibility that the car Dan bought was red. The other possibility, which in my example includes many distinct possibilities, is that the color of the car is of one of the colors that is not red.¹³ It can now be clearly seen why, in order for the word “red” to contribute to the meaning of the sentence “The car Dan bought is red,” its occurrence in the negative must describe a possible state of affairs: the word “red” is used as a coordinate on the conceptual dimension that includes the possibilities both of Dan’s car being red and not being red. Without the possibility of Dan’s car not being red, the word “red” would not be needed as a coordinate, because the conceptual dimension in which it is used as a coordinate would be lost, that is, there would be no different possibilities to choose from with the help of the word “red.”

A minimal conceptual dimension, therefore, must include at least two distinct possibilities. In cases in which the conceptual dimension includes only two possibilities, it is possible to use, in order to map the possibilities in this dimension, just one word: this word would designate one of these possibilities, while the other possibility would be designated by the same word together with a negation word. When a conceptual dimension includes more than two possibilities, more words are needed to map the whole dimension (in our example: red, green, blue, etc.).

I use the expression “conceptual space,” to refer to the totality of all the conceptual dimensions in which a proposition is located. To expose the conceptual space in which a certain proposition is located, what must be examined is the possibility of the words in that sentence occurring in it in the negative. For example, the conceptual space of the proposition “Socrates is Greek” includes the following possibilities (Table 2.1):

¹³ Some may object that this analysis of the function of negation fails to explain the proposition “The concept five is not red,” because this proposition surely does not imply that the concept five is of a different color than red. To this objection I reply that in this alleged counterexample the phrase “not red” does not contribute to meaning of the sentence, because there are not two possibilities, of the concept five being red and not being red, such that the occurrence of the phrase “not red” designates which of these possibilities is realized. My analysis, therefore, which relates to the meaning of negation, that is, to its contribution to the meaning of propositions, is not affected by this alleged counterexample.

So far I have only discussed predicates. I now turn my attention to another component of sentence, the subject, and the conditions that must obtain for it to contribute to the meaning of the sentence. In what follows I concentrate on names, for they present the greatest challenge for the application of the type of analysis presented earlier to the subject of a sentence. I begin by pointing out that names are words that contribute to the determination of the truth-value of propositions which are expressed by the sentences in which they occur, and so are meaningful signs according to my use of these terms. Secondly, because names are meaningful signs, it follows that the general analysis presented earlier applies to them just as it applies to any word (and to any other possible meaningful components of sentences) that contributes to the meaning of the sentence in which it occurs. In order for a name, to contribute to the meaning of the sentence in which it occurs, it must be conceptually possible to deny its contribution. Otherwise, its contribution to the meaning of the sentence could be assumed without the name appearing in the sentence, in which case the occurrence of the name would thus be superfluous to its meaning and so would not contribute to the meaning of that sentence. In trying to apply the above analysis to names, however, one soon discovers the difference between predicates and names: it is clear what is meant by negation of a property (as a property of something), but it is not at all clear how an object can be negated and what the claim as to the negation of an object could mean. However, the conclusion of the earlier analysis with regard to predicates was that it should be possible to negate the specific contribution of the word naming the predicate, and not the thing predicated itself. A similar situation holds with regard to words used to name things and the things the names designate. The application of the above condition to different words, therefore, can take different forms, which depend on the various ways different words contribute differently to the meaning of sentences. Consequently, the key for applying that conclusion to names is determining the contribution of names to the meaning of sentences.

To determine the exact contribution of the name “Socrates” to the meaning of the sentence “Socrates is Greek,” it would be helpful to consider the case of someone who did not hear clearly the beginning of the sentence, and asks: “Who is Greek?” The answer “Socrates” would contribute to the partial description, that is, that there is someone who is Greek, because of the conceptual possibility of other objects, besides Socrates, being Greek. Without such a possibility there would be no point in asking who is Greek, because it could only be Socrates.¹⁴

¹⁴ This claim is surely not new to those familiar with what has become known as the Generality Principle, first introduced by Strawson (1959, p. 99). The consideration behind Strawson’s principle is however different (perhaps influenced by Kant’s distinction between concepts and intuitions) and based on the claim that “the idea of a predicate is correlative with that of a range of distinguishable individuals of which the predicate can be significantly [...] affirmed” (Strawson 1959, p. 99 n. 1). Evans’ Generality Constraint, on the other hand, should not be confused with the present principles, because it is a constraint on the explanation of the ability to *understand* an existing conceptual complexity of a language, and not a constraint on the existence of that complexity (Evans 1982, pp. 100–105).

Table 2.2 The conceptual space of the proposition “Socrates is Greek”

Socrates is Greek	Someone that is not Socrates is Greek
Socrates is not Greek	Someone that is not Socrates is not Greek

The similarity between predicates and names, in terms of the conditions for a word to contribute to the meaning of a sentence, is easily discerned if we examine the possible answer “It is not Socrates” to the question “Is it Socrates?” The possibility of adding a negation to the name “Socrates” is clear in this case. This show that even in the case of names, the specific contribution can be negated, although the negation takes different form from that of negation of predicates. Once this is understood it is easier to see how the contribution of the name “Socrates” to the meaning of the sentence depends on the possibility of other objects, or at least one object, other than Socrates, being Greek. The contribution of the name “Socrates” to that sentence is that it claims that it is Socrates, out of all those to which the predicate “Greek” can be ascribed meaningfully (that is, that the predicate “Greek” contributes to the meaning of the sentences in which it is ascribed to them), is being referred to. Negating that contribution simply means that it is someone other than Socrates who is being referred to, out of all those who can (conceptually) be Greek. The conceptual dimension of the name Socrates, in the above sentence, thus includes every object to which the predicate “Greek” can be meaningfully ascribed (and therefore it is relative to the predicate), and the name “Socrates” contributes to the meaning of the sentence by designating one of the possibilities in that dimension. This is why, if it were not for the conceptual possibility of someone other than Socrates being Greek, the name Socrates could not contribute to the meaning of the sentence “Socrates is Greek.” The possibilities in that dimension can be generally divided into two possibilities: that Socrates is Greek or that someone that is not Socrates is Greek.¹⁵

The condition that must obtain for a word to contribute to the meaning of a sentence, that is, that affirming and denying that contribution would describe a possible state of affairs, applies to names, just as it applies to predicates. Nevertheless it may seem that there is a critical difference between the application of this condition to predicates and its application to names, with regard to negating that contribution, but, as I have shown, the underlying principle is the same, that is, that what is negated is the contribution of the word for the meaning of the sentence in which it occurs.¹⁶

¹⁵ It is also possible to simplify the notation, and stress the similarity between names and predicates, by the convention that adding the negation “not” to the name “Socrates,” that is, “not-Socrates is Greek,” would mean “Someone that is not Socrates is Greek.”

¹⁶ It must be said that there is a difference between the negation of the contribution of subject and that of a predicate. For example, the propositions “Socrates is Greek” and “not Socrates is Greek” are consistent, but the propositions “Socrates is Greek” and “Socrates is not Greek” are not consistent. This difference, however, has no bearing on the analogy between predicate and name/subject, with regard to the conditions for a word to contribute to the meaning of a sentence.

The conceptual space of the proposition “Socrates is Greek” can be therefore be generally divided-into four parts, each indicating a different conceptual possibility (or possibilities), arranged in two dimensions (Table 2.2):

Each of the conceptual dimensions is mapped with the use of a word, one of the two words that partly constitute the sentence, which can occur in a sentence alone or together with a negation, and thus used as a coordinate on that dimension.¹⁷

Some may object that the proposition “Socrates is Greek” is actually located in a conceptual space that includes three dimensions, one for each of three components of the sentence: the word “Socrates,” the word “Greek” and the word “is,” that is, the predicative element: The word “Socrates” designates one of the different objects to which the predicate “Greek” can be meaningfully ascribed. If it were conceptually impossible, for anyone but Socrates to be Greek, the word “Socrates” could make no contribution to the meaning of the sentence “Socrates is Greek.” The word “Greek” designates one of the properties that could be meaningfully ascribed to Socrates. If the only property we could meaningfully ascribe to “Socrates” was “being Greek,” then the word “Greek” could make no contribution to the meaning of that sentence. The third element is the predicative element, which determines whether the property is affirmed or denied. If both options of Socrates being Greek and not being Greek were not conceptually possible, the ascription of the predicate to the subject cannot be meaningful.

This suggestion also finds support in another idea, according to which the contribution of a word to the meaning of a sentence depends on its ability to be a substitute for another word, and in doing so change the meaning of that sentence. For example, if we compare the sentences “Dan bought a red car” and “Dan bought a fast car,” it would seem that the occurrence of the word “red” contributes to the meaning of the sentence, a contribution that is reflected in the difference in meaning between the two sentences. As I have shown, however, this cannot be a sufficient condition for expressions in language to contribute to the meaning of sentences in which they occur: if it were conceptually impossible for there to be cars that were not red, then the occurrence of the word “red” could have no contribution to the meaning of that sentence. This, however, has nothing to do with the ability to substitute the word “red” with “fast.” If it is conceptually impossible for anyone but Socrates to be Greek, then the name Socrates can make no contribution to the meaning of the sentence “Socrates is Greek,” in spite of the ability to replace “Socrates” with “He” (referring to Socrates) or with “The Philosopher that drank the poison,” or with “Someone.”

But even if that condition is not sufficient, is it a necessary condition? That suggestion seems to be reinforced by the conclusion that the contribution of the

¹⁷ According to Russell’s theory of descriptions, for example, the proposition “Socrates is Greek” actually contains more than two components (for example, it might be claimed that the underlying structure is “The philosopher that drank the poison is Greek”). This analysis, however, does not affect the conclusions of my analysis, because the analysis and its conclusions apply to every meaningful constituent of a proposition, whether it is simple or complex. The proposition “Someone that is not Socrates is Greek” should be analyzed, according to that suggestion, as “Someone that is not the philosopher that drank the poison is Greek.”

name “Socrates” to the sentence “Socrates is Greek” depends upon the conceptual possibility of someone other than Socrates being Greek, for example “Kant is Greek.” Is it also necessary for there to be another property, other than Greek, that could be meaningfully ascribed to Socrates, in order for the predicate “Greek” to contribute to the meaning of that sentence?

To return to the suggestion that there are three conceptual components in the sentence “Socrates is Greek,” the answer is that it is impossible to distinguish between the predicate and the predicative element in the sentence of which the predicate is a part. This impossibility can be clearly seen by the fact that the conditions for the predicate and the predicative element to contribute to the meaning of the sentence are actually the same. First, if the conditions for the predicate to contribute to the meaning of the sentence are met, then the conditions for the meaningfulness of the predicative element are fulfilled. My analysis has already shown that for the predicate “Greek” to contribute to the meaning of the sentence it must be conceptually possible that Socrates is Greek and so that it must be conceptually possible that Socrates is not Greek. In addition it is clear that if the condition for the meaningfulness of the predicative element is met, then the conditions for the predicate to contribute to the meaning of the sentence have also been met: if it is possible that Socrates is Greek and it is possible that Socrates is not Greek, then there is another (possible) predicate, for example “Barbarian,” defined as “not Greek,” that could be meaningfully ascribed to Socrates. The predicate “Barbarian,” in light of our analysis of the working of the language, simply designates another possibility in the conceptual dimension of the predicate “Greek.” There is no need, therefore, to stipulate, in order for the predicate “Greek” to contribute to the meaning of the sentence “Socrates is Greek,” in addition to the stipulation that the property of being Greek would be a contingent property of Socrates, that there would be another property that could be ascribed to Socrates. It follows therefore that “is” is not a separate conceptual component of the sentence from the predicate.

To conclude the discussion of this issue, it can be asserted that a necessary condition, for a word to contribute to the meaning of a sentence, is that it be possible to replace that word with another word and in doing so change the meaning of the sentence. It is wrong, however, to view this assertion as additional condition to the one already formulated. For, as I have shown, if the latter condition is met, the former condition is also met: if it is a name, for example “Socrates” in “Socrates is Greek,” the conceptual possibility of someone else being Greek enables us to use a different name instead of the name “Socrates,” for example “Kant is Greek.” If it is a predicate, for example “red” in the sentence “Dan bought a red car,” the conceptual possibility of denying that property enables us to replace that predicate with a different predicate, for example “Der,” defined as “not red.”

So far I have confined my discussion to the contribution of words to the meaning of sentences. The meaning of sentences, however, is not solely determined by the meaning of the words that it contains. In some cases, the order of the words in the sentence is equally important. In the sentence “Dan loves Dana,” for example, the meaning of the sentence is determined by the order of occurrence of the names

“Dan” and “Dana.” The order of the words, in such cases, contributes to the meaning of the sentences, and therefore is subject to the analysis as to the necessary conditions required of any component of a sentence to contribute to its meaning.

In order to reveal the contribution of the order of the names in the sentence “Dan loves Dana,” and show how to apply the analysis to this conceptual component, it is helpful to imagine a case in which the order of the names was forgotten. In such a case we would only know of the existence of a love relationship between Dan and Dana. The order of the name tells us that it is Dan who loves Dana. That contribution can be denied in the sentence: “There is love relationship between Dan and Dana, but it is not the case that Dan loves Dana,” and this is possible only if it is the case that Dana loves Dan. The order of the names is conceptual component of that sentence, because even if a love relationship is known to exist between Dan and Dana, there are still two possibilities: the possibility that Dan loves Dana and the possibility that Dana loves Dan (or both), and the order of the names in the sentence designates each of these possibilities.

The conceptual components of a sentence are varied. They can be a sign, a relationship between signs or any other feature of the sentence.¹⁸ What is common to every conceptual component of a sentence is they can contribute to its meaning, in the sense that the specific contribution they make to it can be either affirmed or denied while being used to describe a possible state of affairs. I have shown how to apply this requirement to predicates, names and (briefly) to relations. However, once that principle is understood, it is simple to apply this analysis to every different type of component of a sentence.

2.4 Conceptual Dimension and Conceptual Basis

This section is devoted to clarifying two central concepts for the understanding of conceptual analysis: the concepts of conceptual dimension and conceptual basis of a predicate. I first try to further explain and elaborate the idea, which has already been presented, of conceptual dimension of a predicate. My discussion concentrates on predicates because of the complexity of conceptual dimensions of predicates, which needs special attention. As I have already shown, in the simplest case the conceptual dimension of a predicate F includes only two possibilities, F and not- F . It follows from this that each predicate can be presented as a coordinate on a separate conceptual dimension, which includes both itself and its denial. However

¹⁸ It is possible to think of features of a word as contributing to the meaning of a proposition. We can use, for example, a notation in which the order of the names “Dan” and “Dana” is written in italics: the proposition “*Dan* is taller than Dana” and “Dana is taller than *Dan*” would mean, in that notation, what we mean by the proposition “Dan is taller than Dana.” This means, of course, that in that notation word order is not a conceptual component of the proposition, that is, it does not contribute to the meaning of the sentence.

such an analysis results in ignoring other important conceptual ties between different predicates.

The simplest case of two different predicates that are on the same conceptual dimension is when the dimension displays only two possibilities where each one is defined as a negation of the other. In more complex cases the conceptual dimension includes more than two possibilities. An example of a conceptual dimension that includes more than two possibilities is the conceptual dimension that includes such possibilities as, for example, single, married, divorced and widow\widower. It is important to recognize that it is not necessary that the predicates on a single conceptual dimension be mutually exclusive. For example, it is possible to use the predicate “available” to describe anyone that is either single, divorced or a widower. In this case, although the predicate “available” is on the same dimension as the predicate “divorced,” someone can be both available and divorced. What is necessary, however, is that for every possibility, on any conceptual dimension, designated by the predicate F , there is another possibility (which could be a disjunction of several possibilities) that contradicts it, that is, the possibility designated by not- F . If this were not the case, it would not be possible to negate the predicate F and the predicate F would be meaningless. A Conceptual dimension can be characterized, therefore, as a potentially complex structure, which has at its base two, or more, conflicting possibilities.¹⁹ Predicates lying on a single conceptual dimension either designate these possibilities or are defined as a disjunction of these basic possibilities. Predicates can also be defined by a combination of possibilities from different conceptual dimensions, which further complicates the connections between different predicates.

In most cases it is not difficult to determine, even without any explicit criterion, which predicates are located in a specific conceptual dimension. However, it is also true that in not every case is it intuitively clear which predicates lie on the same conceptual dimension. The complexity of our natural languages makes it difficult to formulate a strict criterion for determining which predicates are in the same conceptual dimension. For example, I can try to use the fact that the negation of a predicate designates, as was explained, one of the other possibilities in the conceptual dimension. Thus, if I say that x is not single, then I am saying that either x is married, divorced or a widower.²⁰ But it also follows that either x is married, divorced, a widower or happy. However, that does not mean that “happy” is on the same conceptual dimension. Hence I say that only the predicates needed to create a necessary truth should appear in such a disjunction, for only they belong to the same conceptual dimension: anyone to whom the property of being single can be meaningfully ascribed, is either single, married, divorced or a widower. It is possible, however, to introduce another predicate F , which applies only

¹⁹ In this respect the conceptual dimensions of subjects is different from that of predicates, because in the conceptual dimensions of subjects the possibilities are not conflicting: “Socrates is Greek” and “Someone that is not Socrates is Greek” can be both true.

²⁰ Assuming the occurrence of the predicate in that proposition is meaningful, that is, that predicate is ascribed to something that can, conceptually, be single or not single.

to someone that was once married, that is, x is F if and only if x is married or x is divorced or x is a widower. In this case anyone to whom the property of being single can be meaningfully ascribed, is either single or F , and according to our criterion these two predicates are the only concepts on that conceptual dimension. It is necessary, therefore while determining which predicates lie in the same conceptual dimension, to take into consideration the fact that x is F if and only if x is married or x is divorced or x is a widower.

The importance of determining which predicates lie in a specific conceptual dimension is related to the conceptual connection of dependence between the predicates on that dimension: if the meaning of a predicate is its role as a coordinate on a certain conceptual dimension, its meaning depends upon the existence of other possibilities on that dimension. In the case of dimension that includes just two possibilities, the connection is immediately comprehensible: each concept depends on the other, and a conceptual scheme that does not include one of them could not include the other either. In the case of conceptual dimension that includes more than two possibilities the connection is not so immediately comprehensible, but it can still have significance in conceptual analysis.

As I have shown, not in every example of a word's occurrence in a sentence it does make a contribution to the meaning of that sentence. The meaning of a word is its contribution to the meaning of sentences in which it occurs, and therefore the meaning of a word depends on the sentences in which it occurs and in which it does contribute to their meaning: If it were not for the complexity of the conceptual scheme, that allowed the formulation of such sentences, that is, sentences in which that word does contribute to their meaning, the word could not be given meaning in that conceptual scheme.

By "conceptual basis" of a predicate I mean the category of objects, which, in sentences that ascribe a property to these objects, the predicate contributes to the meaning of the sentences in question. Because the meaning of a predicate depends on the possibility of its occurrence in sentences in which the predicate contribute to their meaning, the meaning of the predicate therefore depends upon that category of objects. The importance of investigating the category of objects, therefore, is to achieve better understanding of the conceptual structure that supports that concept.

Determining the category of objects which is the conceptual basis of a predicate is very important, as I have explained, in order to reveal conceptual ties. The conceptual basis of a predicate is the most inclusive category of objects, which, by ascribing a property to those objects, the predicate can contribute to the meaning of sentences. This means, as my previous analysis has shown, that this property, designated by the predicate, is a contingent property of the objects in that category. Each object, however, in that category, has at least one of the properties that lie in the conceptual dimension of that predicate, and this can be clearly seen by dividing the conceptual dimension into F and not- F : for every object x in that category, either x is F or x is not- F .

While determining the category of objects that comprise the conceptual basis of a predicate, it is important to make sure not only that that category should be

the most inclusive category of objects to which the predicate can be meaningfully ascribed, but also that that category should include as few objects as possible to which said predicate cannot be meaningfully ascribed: the more accurate that category is, that is, more specific, the more we can conclude about the conditions for that predicate to be meaningful. I must stress that in fact every object can be described in a way that does not prevent the ascription of any property to it. For example, although it is conceptually impossible for trees to be married, a tree is a living thing and living things can be married. In contrast, all humans can be married, but bachelors, although they are humans, are not, and cannot be, married. When it is said, therefore, that the conceptual basis of a predicate is a category of objects, what is important is the category, or the predicate that describes these objects: The conceptual connection between a predicate and its conceptual basis is actually a conceptual connection between two concepts, and a conceptual scheme that does not include that category of objects, does not include that predicate either.

2.5 Conclusions

I shall now summarize the results regarding the conception of conceptual analysis that I have adumbrated in the course of this discussion. As I have shown, the meaning of a word (that is, the concept) is its contribution to the meaning of sentences in which it occurs, and therefore the conceptual structure that supports that concept is revealed by analysis of these propositions. Each proposition is located in a conceptual space, divided into different dimensions, which includes all possible states of affairs included in its conceptual scheme. This conceptual space is mapped by the meaningful components in the language, which derive their meaning from their function in this mapping.

When the existence of a conceptual link between two concepts is inquired to, that is, when it is inquired as to whether concept x depends upon concept y , what is actually examined is whether a conceptual scheme that does not include the concept y can include the concept x . This question is answerable within the scope of that conceptual scheme, by examining whether the conceptual scheme in question could still include the concept x if the concept y is excluded from it. In terms of the model of the working of language I have developed, what is done is to narrow the conceptual space by eliminating the possibility designated by the word y , thus excluding concept y from the conceptual scheme, and examine whether the possibility designated by x would then be lost. This can be described as an attempt to refine from the conceptual scheme a partial conceptual scheme that would not include the concept y . This is done by re-mapping only part of the conceptual space, without including the possibility designated by the word y . If there is no use for the word x in re-mapping the remaining conceptual space, that is, the possibility designated by x is lost, then the concept x is not included in the resulting conceptual scheme. It is then possible to conclude that concept x depends upon

concept y . If, on the other hand, there is still a use for the word x in mapping the remaining conceptual space, that is, the possibility designated by x would not be lost, it is possible to conclude that concept x does not depend upon concept y .

The elimination of the possibility designated by y from the conceptual scheme can be done, for example, by simply assuming that this possibility cannot be realized. This can be viewed as an attempt to weave said assumption into the conceptual scheme in question, as if we were creating a conceptual scheme in which the proposition “There are no y ’s” is a conceptual truth and “There is a y ” is a conceptual contradiction.²¹ It is possible to attempt to create, for example, a conceptual scheme that does not include the possibility of objective objects (that is, objects whose existence is independent of any particular states of awareness of them) by weaving the assumption that there can be no objective objects into that conceptual scheme. Assuming that the conceptual basis of the concept of awareness is the category of objective objects, then the implication of weaving that assumption into the conceptual scheme would be the exclusion of the concept of awareness (and also the concept of a subject of awareness) from the resulting conceptual scheme.

It is not necessary, however, in order to eliminate the possibility designated by y (and thus excluding the concept y from the conceptual scheme in question), to assume that the possibility designated by y cannot be realized. In fact, if it is assumed that the property y is always realized, that is, that every z (z being the conceptual basis of concept y) is y , then the whole conceptual dimension of y , and all its different possibilities, is lost. In this case not only the concept y is excluded from the new conceptual scheme, but also all the other concepts on this dimension. The same applies, of course, to the concept x : If, from the assumption used to exclude the concept y from the conceptual scheme in question, it follows that every z (z being the conceptual basis of concept x) is x , the result of weaving this assumption into the conceptual scheme would be that the conceptual dimension of the concept x would be lost, and the concept x , along with the other concepts on this conceptual dimension, would be excluded from the resulting conceptual scheme. For example, suppose it follows, from the assumption used to exclude the concept y , that for every objective object z (assuming that the category of objective objects is the conceptual basis of the concept of awareness) there is awareness of z by every subject of awareness. In this case the result of weaving that assumption into our conceptual scheme is that the concept of awareness (together with the concept of subject of awareness) is excluded from the resulting conceptual scheme.

With this last point I conclude the exposition of the model of conceptual analysis I shall use in this book. Any residual perplexities about this method that remain will, I trust, be clarified by the application I make of it in the discussions that follow.

²¹ Only “as if,” because, naturally, if the elimination would be so drastic, the concept y would not be included in the resulting conceptual scheme, and therefore these propositions would be meaningless in that conceptual scheme, and neither conceptually true or false.

References

- Carruthers, P. (1989). *Tractarian semantics*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Chomsky, N. (1969). Quine's empirical assumptions. In D. Davidson & J. Hintikka (Eds.), *Words and objections: Essays on the work W. V. Quine* (pp. 53–68). Dordrecht: Reidel.
- Davidson, D. (1967). Truth and meaning. *Synthese*, 17, 304–323.
- Dummett, M. (1981). *Frege—philosophy of language*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Evans, G. (1982). *The varieties of reference*. In J. McDowell (Ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Frege, G. (1970). On sense and reference. In P. Geach & M. Black (Eds., trans.) *Translations from the philosophical writings of Gottlob Frege* (pp. 56–78). Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Frege, G. (1980). *The foundations of arithmetic* (J. L. Austin, Trans.). Evanston, Il.: Northwestern University Press.
- Frege, G. (1984). Compound thoughts. In B. F. McGuinness (Ed.) *Collected papers on mathematics, logic and philosophy* (P. Geach & R. H. Stoothoff, Trans.) (pp. 390–406). Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Kripke, S. (1980). *Naming and necessity*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Quine, W. V. O. (1960). *Word and object*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Quine, W. V. O. (1970). On the reasons of indeterminacy of translation. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 67, 178–183.
- Strawson, P. F. (1959). *Individuals*. London: Routledge.
- Stroud, B. (1968). Transcendental arguments. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 65, 241–256.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1963). *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (D. F. Pears & B. F. McGuinness, Trans.). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.



<http://www.springer.com/978-3-319-07184-8>

The Conceptual Structure of Reality

Yehezkel, G.

2014, X, 139 p. 2 illus., Softcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-07184-8