

CHAPTER THREE

QUINE ON INDETERMINACY OF TRANSLATION AS RADICAL TRANSLATION

Quine's concept of indeterminacy of translation has played a central role in his every philosophical decision. In fact, his concept of naturalized epistemology cannot be comprehended without his very idea of **Indeterminacy of Translation**. As a conceptual relativist Quine always advocates a systematic method of translating the language of a group of people. In the previous sequel we have observed that a child gradually accomplishes the mastery over language just by noticing the adult who uses language in different ways. According to Quine, there undergoes a constant revision of language without knowing the truth values of language. **Translation is a natural phenomenon** of the users of language. In this process there remains flexibility. As all we know that Quine is against any sort of philosophical dogmas and in this regard he vehemently criticizes both Kant and Carnap for their dogma based philosophical theories. According to Quine, translation is indeterminate because we always lose the originality when one text is translated into another. Accordingly, there we do not find exact translation if we compare two translation of a single text. Thus, one concerns the translation of complete sentences. Here Quine conjectures that two translation manuals, each fully acceptable, may give translations of a given sentence which are not in any sense equivalent. Having said this, Quine claims that any sort of translation is radical in the sense that during translation our linguist has no prior contact with the language; nor with anyone who has any knowledge of it. However, two linguists, independently engaged in radical translation, might come up with different and incompatible translation manuals, each of which was fully successful. This is where the genesis of the theory of indeterminacy of translation actually hinges on.

3.1 Two Philosophical Assumptions of Indeterminacy of Translation

We think that Quine's thesis of indeterminacy of translation actually hinges on **two philosophical assumptions**. First, the translation manuals that correlate two languages are **under-determined by evidence** very similar to the hypothesis that we notice in science. Secondly, translation manuals are not like hypothesis in the sciences because scientific hypothesis are true or false whereas the question of truth and falsity in the case of translation manuals simply does not arise. The first assumption is relatively uncontroversial as besides Quine there are some other philosophers, such as, Chomsky and Rorty, who accept the same. However, they disagree with Quine regarding the second hypothesis as they do not find any significant difference between translation manuals and scientific hypothesis. Let us try to understand from Quine's perspective why does he anticipate the difference between translation manuals and scientific hypothesis. We think the problem of meaning plays the main role at this juncture. If meaning is defined in terms of verification, falsification or confirmation then surely there is no way of tracing the meaning of any individual sentence down to such notions. This follows from the first assumption, the under-determination of our theory of nature. We know that the meaning of a sentence, according to the verificationist, is determined on the basis of evidential/observational data and truth-value. This is unlikely in the case of Quine. As Quine talks of cognitive language based on stimulation, there is no point of saying of evidence and truth-value. Moreover, no particular meaning can be assigned to a sentence taken in isolation. If it does, then surely it will go against Quine's holism. It is the translation of the whole language that matters, but not the translation of the individual sentences. According to Quine, there is no point in saying that to require a translation manual to correlate sentences that have the same meaning therefore make no sense.

Secondly, as a firm believer of physicalism, Quine thinks it so that meaning and other intensional entities are of no help in explaining what goes on in the world. Accordingly, we have no reason to assume that there are such entities. As a result of that we cannot say after Quine that among the many empirically satisfactory translation manuals there is one that is the right one that matches sentences that express the same meaning. According to Quine, all translation manuals are equally right and each of them can be said to preserve meaning in the legitimate way. Thirdly, an argument which was long overshadowed by Quine's stress on verificationism and physicalism, makes use of an assumption which seems to go much more to the heart of his view on the public nature of language. What linguistic expressions mean has been established by people reacting to the same sort of evidence that we make use of when we try to understand one another. There is no other meaning anywhere that our translation manuals are supposed to capture. According to Quine, even if there are such meanings as Frege and many other philosophers of language or linguistic philosophy have assumed, they would play no role in language learning and communication in the real sense of the term. Therefore, it may be assumed after Quine that the situation in translation manuals is therefore unlike that in natural science.

3.2 The Death of Meaning

We think Quine's philosophical position in some sense or other lies in his attack of standard philosophical views about meaning. The meaning question within the paradigm of linguistic philosophy is highly debatable and linguistic philosophers over the course of history involve into a tug of war regarding the criterion, standard and the functional aspect of meaning. If Quine is right then almost everything that other linguistic philosophers have said and say about meaning is wrong. In fact, many would say that the traditional or classical concept of meaning is **death** if we Quine's position is anticipated. As far as the concept of meaning is concerned Quine objects

two clusters of views. The first is associated with the analytic-synthetic distinction and it goes against Kant. The second is associated with postulation of intensional objects, propositions or meanings in order to account for translation and it goes against Carnap and other semantics. The second group of views is not to be thought of as committed to the existence of **certain queer things**. Its minimum claim is that the sentence of a language has a definite meaning apart from any proposed scheme of translation from the language. It may be said that the theory of meaning is adequate to account for translation and ambiguity, objects of psychological states, such as emotion, feeling, etc., must permit an analytic-synthetic distinction. According to Quine, linguistic philosophers have been almost totally wrong about meaning. He denies that appeal to meaning will do any of the things these philosophers have wanted to do for them. We think Quine's position is nearly tantamount to disbelieving in meaning. When he criticizes or denies the analytic-synthetic distinction, he does not want to say that there is no sharp distinction; rather he intends to say that **nothing is analytically true**. According to Quine, the analytic-synthetic distinction does not resemble the red-orange distinction; it resembles rather the **witch-non-witch distinction**, which actually fails to distinguish anything as there are no witches. As the ascription of analyticity, like the ascription of witchcraft, commits one to an incorrect explanatory claim, there is no point of asserting such distinction. However, some anti-Quinean would like to say that the analytic-synthetic distinction can be drawn without appeal to a controversial explanatory claim, but Quine does not agree with them. According to Quine, if the distinction holds good then it should equally work in ordinary talk about meaning, synonymy, definition, etc. Quine equally denies that the distinction can be taught ostensibly or just by knowing the meaning of the terms of the sentence under consideration. Thus, for Quine that there is no point of introducing

an analytic-synthetic distinction in the way classical and traditional philosophers including Kant had thought of.

Quine is in favour of the propositional sense of meaning as advocated by the whole host of semanticists and the verificational sense of meaning as propounded by the logical positivists or the reductionist sense of meaning as propounded by Carnap, and others. For Quine, an adequate account of belief and desire, etc., must treat psychological states as attitudes towards sentences rather than as attitudes towards propositions. He further contends that an adequate account of translation does not require reference to preservation of meaning if meaning is taken to be fixed by the language independently of some general scheme of translation. Acquiring meaning without translation is false. Determinate, fixed meaning is not possible. Adequate accounts of translation, psychological attitudes, ambiguities, etc., all are integral part of meaning but unfortunately attempt has been made to avoid the logistic support of these entities.

Does it then lead us to assume that Quine was against the postulation of intensional objects? We do not think so. He does not intend to say that intensional objects, propositions or meanings are a queer kind of entity. In fact Quine was a believer of abstract entities as used in set theory. What he denies is the mode of explanation regarding those objects. His attitude toward intensional objects is similar to his attitude toward phlogiston or the ether. In fact Quine does not attempt to show that these views are a priori false or necessarily false. Quine does not argue that a defender of analyticity or of intensional objects can be led into inconsistency. Rather he intends to say that there is a substantial lack of defending their claims in favour of meaning. For Quine, just like we can reject the theories of witchcraft, phlogiston, the ether, likewise we can reject the theory of meaning as propounded by the classical thinkers. Even Quine at times inclines to say there is no way to make sense of analytic-synthetic distinction. He claims that this distinction from the strict

sense of the term is meaningless. In support of Quine, Gilbert Harman says ‘that nothing is analytic, all that truth or falsity is synthetic’. Quine wants to say that one cannot make sense of the analytic-synthetic distinction simply on the ground that they turn out to be analytic truths. Quine’s message is that the analytic-synthetic distinction, intensional objects of psychological states, meanings and propositions is no better off than witches, the ether, phlogiston, or God and God is dead. The meaning as sought by the linguistic philosophers, particularly semantics, is dead. While determining meaning, they hold bad empirical theories.

3.3 Full Blooded Theory of Analytic Truth: Quine’s Reservation

According to this theory, analytic truth is known solely by virtue of meaning or that are knowable solely by virtue of meaning. Just by using the term; ‘by virtue’, a full blooded theory of analytic truth commits its defender to an explanatory claim about meaning. According to Kant, an analytic proposition has two distinctive features. First, the predicate term of an analytic statement is overtly or covertly contained by the subject term and secondly, the denial of an analytic statement always leads to a contradiction. Thus, following Kant we can say that **meaning** is always part of the reason why a sentence expresses a truth. Since the sentence could be made to express a falsehood by assigning different meaning to the words that make up the sentence. The sentence ‘All bachelors are unmarried’ expresses a truth by virtue of their meaning plus the way the world is. The sentence is analytic and it is known as truth just by looking at the meaning of the subject and predicate term of the sentence under consideration. Likewise the sentence ‘Copper conducts electricity’ expresses a truth because it means what it does and **because of the way the world is**. If the meaning were suitably different or if the laws of nature in the world were suitably different, the sentence under consideration would not express a truth. According to the full blooded theory of analytic truth, there are other sentences that express truth

solely by virtue of their meaning and independently of the way the world is. The sentence ‘Copper is a metal’ or the sentence ‘Red roses are red’ would be said to express truths solely by virtue of their meanings. They express truths would be said to have nothing to do with the way the world is, apart from the fact that these sentences have the meaning they have. But how do we understand or cognize the truth of a sentence that would be independent of the way the world is and depend entirely on the meaning of the sentence? Moreover, if analyticity is taken as knowability by virtue of knowledge of meaning, then why should it not be counted as knowing something about the world to know that copper is a metal? Proponent of this view would like to say that if someone sincerely denies these sentences he must fail to understand what he is saying. Quine does not agree with this. According to Quine, the problem for a defender of analyticity is to show how in certain cases each compulsion or obviousness is a sign of truth or knowability by virtue of meaning. One may say that it would be a matter of convention that a given word means what it does. Our convention might have been different and we can change them now if we desire to do so. Such a change in our convention would affect the truth and falsity of sentences like ‘Copper conducts electricity’. A conventionalist further argues that meaning depends on conventions for the use of an expression and the relevant conventions specify which sentences are to be counted true and which false. Here we have adopted certain rules or conventions that assign truth or falsity to sentences like ‘Copper is a metal’ and ‘Wood is not a metal’. The so-called conventions act as a ready reference on the basis of which one can determine the meaning of the word ‘copper’, ‘metal’, ‘wood’, and the logical words like ‘if’, ‘not’, ‘every’ etc. As a result of that certain principles are true by virtue of meaning, i.e., by virtue of convention.

Quine does not endorse the conventionalist account of meaning. According to Quine, the conventionalist would face a major difficulty if it is supposed to account for the logical truth and

falsity. An infinite number of sentences of logic require conventional assignments of truth and falsity. Conventionalist, however, seemingly holds that we make certain general conventions that together assign truth or falsity to the infinite set. But the problem with conventionalism is that of dealing with logical words. It has been objected by saying that conventionalism in logic thus either proves circular or heads to an infinite regress. Moreover, even if we think that conventional assignments of truth and falsity determine meaning, from this it does not follow that a sentence assigned truth is true by virtue of convention or false by virtue of convention. Even some relevant notion of convention cannot be distinguished from the notion of postulation. Accordingly, it can be said that since ‘truth by convention’ is ‘truth according to one’s conventions, postulates,’ truth by conventions does not guarantee truth and therefore cannot accept for truth. For similar ground conventionalism must fail to account for knowledge of truth by virtue of knowledge of meaning because knowledge of meaning is not sufficient for knowledge that it is true.

One may say that the ultimate defense of full blooded theory of analytic truth actually hinges on the entitlement that some truths are either necessarily true or knowable a priori, where the notion of necessary truth and a priori knowledge are given special meaning. It has been claimed and proved that all necessary or a priori truth must be analytic truth; i.e., true by virtue of meaning or knowable by virtue of knowledge of meaning. A sentence expresses a necessary truth if, given the meaning of the sentence, it must be true no matter what. Likewise a sentence expresses an a priori truth if knowledge of its meaning can suffice for knowledge of its truth. Accordingly, we can say that the meaning of such a sentence guarantees its truth. Simplistically, it can be said that knowledge of meaning is enough for knowledge of truth and either the a priori or the necessary or both can be identified with the analytic. For example, the sentence ‘Copper is a metal’ and

‘Copper is copper’ are said to express necessary truth and also said to be knowable a priori. Hence they are analytic as well. This classical position of the concept of analyticity, necessity and a priority are not very clear to Quine. A prior knowledge may be either relative or absolute. One has to have an absolutely a priori knowledge. Likewise, certain truths may be necessary being the laws of nature or being discovered by science. However, such natural necessity cannot guarantee analyticity because truths arising out of laws of nature are synthetic and only necessary truths are analytic. Laws of nature do not hold solely by virtue of the meaning of words used to express those laws. Moreover, laws of nature are not absolutely necessary as they need not have been true. There are conceivable worlds in which they do not hold. Therefore, Quine thinks that the notions of absolutely a priori knowledge and of truths absolutely necessary are obscure. Quine concludes by saying that no truths are a priori or necessary and therefore that no truth is analytic in the full blooded sense. For Quine, it is not clear how meaning can account for truth or knowledge of meaning account for knowledge for truth. Quine’s argument is equally effective against the effective theory that has been engaged in identifying the analytic truths as those that are either explicitly or implicitly truths of logic. For example, ‘A male sibling is male’ represents an explicit logical truth where the equivalence is equivalence by virtue of meaning. According to the weaker theory, sentences expressing logical truths are count as analytic truths. There is nothing wrong in logical truth. In fact logical truths are undisputable, but the claim that two sentences are equivalent by virtue of meaning requires further discussion. Quine puts more emphasis on the explanatory use of meaning. For Quine, a notion of analytic truth or meaning equivalence that had **no explanatory use** would eventually fail to resemble sufficiently anything philosophers have in the past meant by those expressions. One cannot uphold the weak theory of analytic truth by simply appeal to ordinary or philosophical talk about meaning, synonymy,

definition and analyticity. As an alternative one must *explicitly justify the explanatory claim involved in ‘equivalent by virtue of meaning’*. For Quine, the ascription of analyticity commits one to an explanatory claim that something can be true or knowable by virtue of meaning or at least that two sentences can be equivalent by virtue of meaning. So far it seems to us that there is no way in which meaning might provide such explanation.

There is a section of philosophers who run with the conviction that language is often used to express a speaker’s psychological attitudes that may perhaps be incompatible with Quine’s rejection of the notion of meaning equivalence. According to this view, two or more sentences would be equivalent by virtue of meaning if they express the same **psychological attitude**, i.e., if they express the same belief. If the same belief can be expressed by several different sentences, then surely a belief cannot be construed simply as the acceptance of a sentence. Accordingly, it has been claimed that psychological states represent attitudes towards propositions. Quine objects to this philosophical position. He thinks that the postulation of propositional attitudes underlying one’s sentential attitudes purports to offer an explanatory without really doing so. Quine, of course, agrees that there are such things as accepting a sentence as true, or desiring a sentence to be true, thinking a sentence as true along with the line of psychological states. However, this does not make sense to assume that propositional attitudes can acquire these sentential attitudes. In fact, Quine denies that a person accepts a sentence because he accepts a proposition or meaning expressed by that sentence. For Quine, belief takes the upper hand in order to determine the meaning of sentence. Therefore, it can be said after Quine that identifying the underlying belief has a paramount importance as the acceptance of a proposition or meaning. According to Quine, different sentential attitudes are often identified in ordinary speech depends on shifting context and hence it does not presuppose postulation of something behind the

sentence. Philosophers often seek the reason for postulating propositions of meanings in translation. For them translation consists in finding a sentence in one language that ‘has’ the same meaning or express the same proposition as a given sentence in the other. Quine argues that this is not a correct account of translation because it makes no sense to speak of the translation of a single sentence of one language into a sentence of another language apart from other translations one would make. Translation, Quine opines, must proceed against the background of a general scheme of translation from the one language to the other. Quine does not accept any predetermined general scheme of the notion of translation. In fact Quine thinks that translation is indeterminate but still radical. Without reference to a general scheme of translation, the notion of the translation of an isolated sentence of number theory is indeterminate. Quine claims that this sort of indeterminacy holds the radical translation in general. One cannot speak of translation apart from a scheme of translation. Radical translation is always indeterminate. In this regard Quine finds the intimate connection between **translation** and **psychology**. Translation, Quine opines, always involve certain psychological states, e.g., desires and beliefs. Indeterminacy is inexorable unless there are fairly strong restraints. As Quine gives emphasis on psychological attitudes and denies any strong propositional restraints, any sort of translation must survive within indeterminacy. Thus, we can say that indeterminacy is *sui-gensis* in Quine’s translation manual. The possibility of translation from one language to another does not support the postulation of intensional objects, meanings, or propositions. Translation does not require antecedently existing meaning relations between sentences of different language apart from some proposed scheme of translation from the one language to the other. Quine believes that the basic psychological reality consists in attitude one has to sentences in one language along with connections among these attitudes and between these attitudes and their causes and effects, such

as, observation and speech. The postulations such as meanings, propositions, intensional objects are wrong because these are incompatible with the indeterminacy of radical translation.

We think Quine admits **an account of verbal disagreement** in his translation manuals. Quine anticipates verbal disagreement within ‘identity schemes’. As a conceptual relativist Quine inclines to say that identity schemes ascribes to others roughly the same beliefs he has and roughly the same methods of belief formation. Sometimes it may perhaps be the case that a relatively obvious modification of the identity translation will translate beliefs, etc., that appear to diverge from one’s own beliefs, etc., into beliefs, etc., similar to one’s own. In this way, one will accept the modified translation scheme and take the apparent disagreement belief to be **merely verbal**. If we stand by this philosophical position of Quine then certainly the analytic – synthetic distinction made by the classical thinkers including Kant would be in danger. As we know that the analytic proposition is determined on the fixity of meaning and the trouble incurs when we come to know that in any change from one view to another tends to involve a change in meaning. Any change in view represents some change in meaning. The question of meaning transitivity in the case of translation simply does not arise whereas the proponents of the analytic-synthetic distinction need transitivity. There has been no change in meaning in analytic-synthetic distinction and as a result of that it can be said any move from A to B has not changed the analytic statements of meaning postulates of the theory in question. But how do we come to know that two statements have the similarity of meaning? If meaning is psychological in nature associated with beliefs and stimulation then there is no point of saying ‘similarity of meaning’. Thus, the mistake, according to Quine, lies in confusing similarity of meaning. There are other problems as well associated with the analytic-synthetic distinction but the mistake about similarity of meaning plays a vital role.

3.4 Translation and Meaning

So far we have seen how surface irritations generate through language one's knowledge of the world. It is further noted after Quine that the classical notion of meaning primarily associated with the concept of truth about the world is **death** because through stimulations there emerges something recognizable as talks of things. Therefore, it can be said that the so-called meaning enquiring through translation would be a different adventure altogether that stands against the classical interpretation of meaning based on propositional meaning. Thus, the first step of translation or so to speak radical translation is to pay attention after Quine "how much of language can be made sense of in terms of its stimulus conditions, and what scope this leaves for empirically unconditioned variation in one's conceptual scheme"⁶⁸. As a conceptual relativist, Quine says that manuals for translating of one language into another can be set up in divergent ways, all compatible with the totality of speech dispositions, yet incompatible with one another. Translations are diverse in nature. One sentence may be translated in diverse ways. Two translation manuals may give translations of a given sentence which are not in any sense equivalent. Even at times it may be the case that translation can be applied on the part of sentence under consideration. It may perhaps be the case that two fully acceptable translations may give different translations of sub-sentential parts of language. However, this does not create the difference between the sentences rather the difference if there be any may be overcome so that for the whole sentences the two translations give roughly equivalent readings. Here special attention has been laid on the translations of referring expressions what Quine terms as 'indeterminacy of reference' and at times he reads it as 'inscrutability of reference'. Quine calls it indeterminate because he explicitly takes this idea, not the indeterminacy of reference, to be

⁶⁸ Quine, W. V. O., *Word and Object*, op. cit., p. 26.

‘the serious and controversial thesis on indeterminacy of translation’⁶⁹. Many contemporary thinkers, of course, following Quine termed it as ‘holophrastic indeterminacy’. Many would say that even though these two doctrines are of great importance, but it was not made clear in his book *Word and Object*. Even though Quine initially begins with indeterminacy of reference but in his later writings he was more concerned about holophrastic indeterminacy. Quine initially developed the concept of radical translation and its indeterminacy in his book *Word and Object*. Quine’s concept of radical translation as a way of making claims about *meaning tangible* goes back almost Quine’s earlier work. Anyway, Quine’s general idea of radical translation is to give an approach to language which is evidently empirical. It engages to know about how language could be learnt and how much can be made of the idea of meaning. In this regard Quine was consistently denying anything about non-empirical. As Quine’s understanding of language is evidently empirical, it would equally be observable. This distinctive aspect of Quine’s indeterminacy is that it stands or appears against synonymy and propositional meanings. This position of Quine actually goes against Kant and Carnap. Quine’s famous article ‘Two Dogmas of Empiricism’ tells the story what we are saying at this point of time.

The question that needs to be taken care of **what the indeterminacy of translation amounts to?** What exactly is indeterminacy of translation? To find a suitable answer to this question we have to explain, in brief, the concept of translation manual and also to know about under what condition or situation translation manual would be successful. One might say that a manual is successful if it translates any sentence of the one language by an equivalent and synonymous sentence of the other. Thus, in a sense the very starting point of translation manual rules out indeterminacy. However, Quine rules out any sort of understanding of translation based on

⁶⁹ Quine, W. V. O., *Pursuit of Truth*, op. cit., p. 50.

synonymy because Quine is skeptical about the notion of synonymy based on propositional meanings and truth. For Quine, our ordinary practice of translation does not presuppose it. In fact, Quine conceives the success of a translation manual from practical terms. It is indeed a matter of manual's efficacy that would facilitate the 'fluent dialogue and successful negotiation'⁷⁰ with the speakers of the translated language. Further Quine says, "The practical purpose of such a manual would be inculcation in us of fluency and effectiveness in the native language. ... I picture the whole enterprise as directed to the holistic objective of communication."⁷¹ Quine's main position is that the two linguists might produce incompatible translation manuals each of which is fully successful in this sense. Even though translation to Quine is indeterminate but this does not make sense to say after Quine that it is paradoxical or impossible. Indeterminacy is sui-generis for any sort of translation and it does not seem to be problematic. Hintikka expresses serious reservation over the indeterminacy of translation manual. Quine in a response to Hintikka says, "I am in favour also of translation, even radical translation. I am concerned only to show what goes into it."⁷² In fact Quine does not recognize any serious problem of indeterminacy of translation. However, Quine anticipates an attack on translation if one assumes that the only way to understand translation is as preserving synonymy. As we know instead of giving emphasis on the notion of synonymy Quine actually offers us a different type of translation where indeterminacy does not appear as threaten to translation. If the so-called translation is primarily concerned with synonymy then there is a one and uniform way of translation because in such a case one has to give emphasis just on the very meaning of propositional language and nothing else. Thus, there we do not have any alternative ways of

⁷⁰ Quine, W. V. O., *From Stimulus to Science*, op cit., p. 80.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 82.

⁷² Davidson, D. and Hintikka, J., (eds.), *Words and Objections: Essays on the Work of W. V. Quine* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1969), p. 312.

translation because there is no scope of shuffling or reshuffling propositional meaning. Quine's translation manual is based on stimulation response where meaning is determined on the basis of beliefs and it may be possible of making successful translation in more ways than one.

Does it then lead us to assume that Quine rules out the possibility that two translation manuals would be different and incompatible? In *Word and Object*, Quine goes on to say that a single sentence may be translated into two different sentences which are not equivalent in any plausible sense of equivalence. This point had been raised by Harman. Quine in his reply to Harman says that it is just one translator who can reject the translation of other translator. For Quine, it may perhaps be the case that 'the English sentence prescribed as translation of a given Jungle sentence by two rival manuals might not be interchangeable in English contexts.' Even one may notice different and incompatible operational test in two translation manuals each of which makes for smooth communication. We may apply them alternatively just by translating one sentence by one manual and next the other sentence by other manual. In this process we can regularly translate **discourse** in the target language into something incoherent in our language. However, if the alternative use of manuals destroys our fluent interaction with the speaker of the target language then in such a case two manuals count as **different** and **incompatible**.

3.5 Is Indeterminacy Epistemological or Ontological?

There is no question of doubt that Quine's thesis of the indeterminacy of translation is probably the most well-known and most widely discussed thesis in contemporary philosophy of language. Despite the widespread discussion of the thesis of indeterminacy of translation, it still remains obscure and unclear particularly on the issue whether the thesis of indeterminacy of translation is an **ontological matter** or **epistemological matter**. The main reason for this unclarity is that the

thesis characteristically takes two different forms, such as, **an epistemological form** (where it is primarily concerned with the relation between translation manuals and the possible evidence or data which we use to choose between such manuals) and **an ontological form** (in which it concerns the relation between translation manuals and the ‘totality of facts’ or ‘the whole truth about nature’). Thus, from ontological perspective it can be said that there is no fact of matter about correct translation. Philosophers are often confused and as a result of that he (Quine) has been misinterpreted. So, we must be careful regarding the question what is indeterminacy? Indeterminacy is the claim that ‘there is nothing to discover’, ‘nothing for the lexicographer or linguist to be right or wrong about’, as Quine says in his “Meaning in Linguistics”. Facilitating ‘fluent dialogue and successful negotiation’ is not merely how we find out that we have a good translation manual, rather it is all that correctness that can amount to for such manuals. If two manuals each of which fulfill this criterion completely, then each is supposed to be correct. This is all about of translation manual.

Let us begin with the **epistemological** or **methodological** point of view. It is said that indeterminacy thesis treats the issue from an epistemological or methodological point of view. It states that the problem is the **relationship** between our data and methods for selecting translation manuals on the one hand and the translation manual we eventually select on the other. The thesis makes the claim that our data and the methods do not determine **a unique choice of translation**. As a result of that there will always be incompatible translation manuals correspondingly well supported by *the totality of our evidence*. We know that epistemological inquiry of any sort is evidential in nature where sense data count the most. Philosophers often find the epistemological or methodological reading of indeterminacy thesis in Quine’s writing. One of such a passage is just like the following where Quine says that “the linguist’s finished jungle-to-English manual

has as its net yield an infinite *semantic correlation* of sentences ... Most of the semantic correlation is supported only by analytical hypotheses, in their extension beyond the zone where independent evidence for translation is possible. That those unverifiable translations proceed without mishap must not be taken as pragmatic evidence of good lexicography, for mishap is impossible.”⁷³ Thus, it is assumed that many discussions of the indeterminacy thesis are epistemological or methodological one. As a result of that we notice a philosophical debate about what are the correct ‘constraints’ on the methodology of translation; whether the ‘principle of charity’ is a good methodological principle etc. Having said this we think that this epistemological debate does not address itself to the whole problem raised by Quine’s work. Quine repeatedly states that his point is not an epistemological or methodological one. According to Quine, if it is supposed to be an epistemological or so to speak methodological in the real sense of the term then certainly there would appear or reveal a philosophical stage in which one may know something about correct translation. But there is no correct translation that we can either know or fail to know according to Quine. In fact there is no *fact of matter* on the basis of which one may assume which translation is correct or incorrect. Quine says, “The point is not that we cannot be sure whether the analytical hypothesis is right, but that there is not even ... an objective matter to be right or wrong about.”⁷⁴

Many commentators would like to say that if Quine denies any epistemological or methodological relevance in indeterminacy then his theory of indeterminacy would simply be treated as a special case of the more general idea of *under-determination* of theory by evidence. Noam Chomsky particularly raised this objection against Quine. Quine, however, does not think that indeterminacy should occasion any concern whatsoever. He does not think that it is merely a

⁷³ Quine, W. V. O., *Word and Object*, op. cit., p. 71.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 73.

special case of the *under-determination of theory of evidence* as raised by Chomsky. Quine holds a more general thesis of the under-determination of theory. For Quine, not only translation theory but all of science is epistemologically underdetermined by our evidence. There will always be incompatible total scientific theories equally well supported by the totality of evidence. But the point is that indeterminacy thesis is supposed to distinguish translation theory from the rest of science. Further the indeterminacy conjecture is not that two manuals of translation may each be compatible with the available evidence; rather each may be compatible with all of the facts about the world. While replying to Chomsky, Quine goes on to say that the indeterminacy of translation is not just inherited as a special case of the under-determination of our theory of nature. It is parallel but additional. By indeterminacy Quine mean "... where indeterminacy of translation applies, there is no real question of right choice; there is no fact of the matter even to *within* the acknowledged under-determination of a theory of nature."⁷⁵

We can say after Quine that in cases of indeterminacy there is ‘no fact of the matter’ as to determine which translation is correct. The intended notion of fact of the matter is not **transcendental**. It is ontological. It deals with a question of reality and to be taken naturalistically within our system of the world. This clearly reflects that Quine intends to be making something more than an epistemological claim in his thesis of the indeterminacy of translation. He inclines to say that not only translation is indeterminate by all our evidence; it is not even determined by all the facts there are, nor even be determined by all the truths about nature. Many would say that this position of Quine is very strong and it would be trivially false if we do not carry out some kind of limitation on what can be part of the ‘totality of truths of nature’. In Quine’s case the necessary limitation springs from his **physicalism**. Quine believes

⁷⁵ See Quine, W. V. O., “Reply to Chomsky”, in D. Davidson and J. Hintikka (eds.), *Words and Objections: Essays on the Work of W. V. Quine*, op. cit., p. 303.

that physics is our most basic and fundamental theory of the world; it should be treated our ‘ultimate parameter’. Accordingly, the totality of truths about the entities dealt with the physics represents the totality of truths that there are. Since Quine believes that the totality of truths of nature is identical with the totality of truths of physics, the ontological version of the indeterminacy thesis amounts to the claim that translation is not determined by the set of truths of physics. Of course, Quine elsewhere in *Word and Object* speaks of the objective data and in a likelihood manner he goes on to say that “our only data are native utterances and their outwardly observable circumstances.”⁷⁶ Many would presume that translation actually hinges on synonymy, but Quine gives us a different account of translation. For Quine, indeterminacy does not create a barrier or so to speak creep up the practice of translation. Quine does not rule out the possibility of successful translation. However, Quine does not think that translation process is a single tract process rather he admits the possibility of translation in more ways than one.

So, the vital question at this point of time is to examine in what sense are the two translation manuals ‘different and incompatible?’ As a firm believer of manifold of translations of single sentence, Quine rules out the possibility of producing as translations of a single sentence into two sentences which are equivalent. Quine in this regard says that the possibility of equivalence of meaning of two translations of a single sentence is nil. He in fact dislikes even the minimum appeal to the notion of equivalence. It may perhaps be possible that one translator would reject the other translation of a given sentence. However, later on Quine modifies his earlier stance on translation. He improves upon himself by saying ‘that the English sentence prescribed as translation of a given Jungle sentence by two rival manuals might not be interchangeable in English contexts.’ Now he inclines to say that we have two translation manuals, each of which

⁷⁶ Quine, W. V. O., *Pursuit of Truth*, op. cit., p. 38.

makes for smooth communication. However, Quine equally admits the possibility of ‘different and incompatible’ within the process of communication. According to Quine, in different translations we employ them alternatively, translating one sentence by one manual, then the next sentence by the other manual, the next by the first, and so on. In this process, we regularly translate discourse in the target language into something incoherent in our language. However, if the alternative use of the manuals terminates our fluent interaction with the speaker of the target language, then ‘the two manuals count as different and incompatible’⁷⁷. The genesis of Quine’s indeterminacy is that ‘there is nothing to discover’. There is nothing for the lexicographer or for the linguist to be right or wrong about as Quine says in his ‘Meaning and Linguistics’. For Quine, ‘fluent dialogue and successful negotiation’ is not merely how we find out that we have a good translation manual; rather it is all that correctness can amount to for such manuals. In fact, if it would be the case that two manuals each fulfill this criterion completely then *each is completely correct*. This is the fundamental aspect one must adhere when engaging himself in translation manual.

3.6 A Contemporary debate between Indeterminacy and Under-determinacy

We note a contemporary debate regarding Quine’s dual concepts, such as, indeterminacy and under-determination. According to Quine, indeterminacy of translation is ‘an indeterminacy additional to the under-determination of nature’.⁷⁸ Here Quine takes the realistic view of nature. He then goes on to say that natural science is under-determined by all possible observation. A theory from physicalist or natural point of view may be treated as determinate or under-determine, but translation always remains indeterminate. In this sense, Quine claims that the

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 48.

⁷⁸ Quine, W. V. O., “Indeterminacy of Translation Again”, *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 84 (1987), p. 10.

indeterminacy of translation is additional to under-determination of theory. Indeterminacy is *sui-generis* of translation. Accordingly, it can be said that translation remains indeterminate even in a situation in which we do not face under-determination in the real sense of the term. Even though, under-determination may be associated with the very idea of indeterminacy, but indeterminacy and under-determination have their independent locus. Indeterminacy is an ‘enduring trait of language’⁷⁹ to the nature of linguistic meaning. Contrary to that, under-determination of theory is supposed to be a thesis about the relation between our theories and the evidence. In this regard, Gibson makes an interesting observation. For him, the doctrine of under-determination of theory claims that theories about the world transcend all possible observations of the world. In this process some competing theories can be developed on the same observational basis. They appear to be logically incompatible but empirically equivalent. This is equally reflected in Quine’s remarks. Quine says, “This is a point on which I expect wide agreement if only because the observational criteria of theoretical terms are commonly so flexible and fragmentary”⁸⁰ Under-determination happens to be the case because owing to capture a finite formulation, infinite lot of observation conditionals need to be counted. As a result of that we cannot produce a finite formulation on the basis of infinite conjunction of observational conditions. Thus, for Quine, “there is some freedom of choice of stuffing, and such is the under-determination.”⁸¹ Thus, it appears that under-determination is a practical claim that can be faced by anyone while building theories. It is an epistemological claim which is primarily concerned about the question how theories are linked to observation. Here the links between theoretical and observational talk are

⁷⁹ Gaudet, E., *Quine on Meaning: The Indeterminacy of Translation* (London and New York: Continuum, 2006), p. 68.

⁸⁰ Gibson, R., *Enlightened Empiricism: An Examination of W. V. Quine’s Theory of Knowledge* (Tampa: University Presses of Florida, 1988), p. 12. Or See Quine, W. V. O., “On the Reasons for Indeterminacy of Translation”, *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 67 (1970).

⁸¹ Quine, W. V. O., “On Empirically Equivalent Systems of the World”, *Erkenntnis* 9 (1975), p. 324.

flexible and fragmentary. It underdetermines the theoretical talk. According to Hylton, “Quine insists that indeterminacy of translation is not simply a straightforward instance of under-determination; to suppose that it is is to construe it as an epistemological matter, which is not how Quine intends it. In this argument, under-determination is a crucial premise in an argument for indeterminacy, but the latter is not simply an instance of the former.”⁸²

What then about indeterminacy of translation? According to Quine, indeterminacy of translation is altogether a different thesis. It is a thesis about the **nature of language** and also about **the nature of meaning**. Since we do not have any identity criteria of meanings as such and as we cannot terrify meanings as such, the theory associated with the nature of language and meaning would remain indeterminate. It is no longer associated with epistemological inquire like the theory of under-determination. It has nothing to do with the evidential link between observation and theories. Indeterminacy off translation is linked with **criterion of meanings** whereas under-determination is linked with the relation between **evidence and theory**.

Why does Quine assert that indeterminacy of translation is a claim about the nature of language beyond and above under-determination of theory? Quine thinks it so because he conceives it as an ontological claim instead of epistemological claim. According to Quine, the problem of meaning is no longer epistemological practice; rather it is matter of ontological practice. Being an ontological claim, indeterminacy of translation envisages *what there is* or *what there is not*. It talks about the *furniture of the world*. One should not confuse here between indeterminacy of translation and translation manuals. Translation manuals, according to Quine, do not have any ontology. Translation manuals do not make any suppositions about the furniture of the world. Translations are not based on the identification of meanings or entities. Having said this, under-

⁸² Hylton, P., *Quine*, op. cit., p. 217.

determination and indeterminacy are close concepts because each of these concepts accepts lacking of precision in some sense or other. Under-determination affirms epistemological lack whereas indeterminacy of translation affirms lack of entities on the basis of which theories could be right or wrong. According to Quine, under-determination of theories actually hinges on “the observational criteria of theoretical terms” which are “commonly so flexible and fragmentary”. But in case of indeterminacy of translation, the lack or the absence of determination is a lack of entities about which manuals could be right or wrong.

Is there any epistemic relevance in indeterminacy? Interestingly, some commentators have interpreted indeterminacy with regard to epistemology. For them indeterminacy is a matter of epistemological inquiry. Even though there is a possibility of a unique correct translation, the evidence available to the linguistic and the procedures one may employ do not suffice to determine it. If Quine stands with this philosophical position, then indeterminacy would simply be regarded *as a special case of the more general idea of under-determination of theory by evidence*. Even many would say that Quine perhaps confuses by mixing his concept of *indeterminacy with under-determination*. Perhaps he fails to articulate any deep difference between the two notions. Even many of Quine’s critics are puzzled by his distinction between under-determination and indeterminacy. Bechtel asks, “Why, then, should the availability of alternative translation manuals count against our taking a realistic attitude toward one translational manual? As we do with physical theories, why can we not adopt one of these theories despite the under-determination?”⁸³ Our evidence of the world does not uniquely determine a single theory of the world. In this regard **Chomsky** says, “...serious hypotheses concerning a native speaker’s knowledge of English ... will “go beyond the evidence”. If they

⁸³ Bechtel, P. W., “Indeterminacy and Intentionality: Quine’s Purported Elimination of Propositions”, *Journal of Philosophy*, LXXV (November 1978), p. 654.

did not, they would be without interest. Since they go beyond mere summary of data, it will be the case there are competing assumptions consistent with the data. But why should all of this occasion any surprise or concern?"⁸⁴ Chomsky claims that there remains an asymmetry between under-determination of theory and indeterminacy of translation. He senses asymmetry because he reads indeterminacy of translation as an epistemological claim. According to Chomsky, indeterminacy of translation is nothing but a mere case of under-determination. As a result of that indeterminacy appears as an uninteresting theory to Chomsky. Unlike Quine, Chomsky intends to say that *the notion of fact of the matter* is an epistemological notion and such fact is no way related to physics or to translation. For Chomsky, both manuals and theories are under-determined and as a result of that they lack *a fact of the matter*.

Quine does not agree with Chomsky. He does not think that indeterminacy should concern any occasion. Nor he does think that it is merely a special case of the ***under-determination*** of the theory of evidence. For Quine, indeterminacy conjecture is not that two manuals of translation may each be compatible with the available evidence; rather each may be compatible with all of the facts about the world. The notable aspect of Quine is that within the partial endorsement of *under-determination*, he does not deviate from his realist position. According to Quine, the point about indeterminacy of translation is that it withstands all this truth, the whole about nature. Quine talks in favour of '**the totality of nature**' whether known or unknown, observable and unobservable, past and future. Thus, Quine intends to say that where indeterminacy applies there is *no fact of the matter* even to within the acknowledged under-determination of the theory of nature.

⁸⁴See Chomsky, N., "Quine's Empirical Assumptions", in D. Davidson and J. Hintikka (eds.), *Words and Objections: Essays on the Work of W. V. Quine*, op. cit., pp. 66-67.

We think there are two points to be noted. First, indeterminate theory is not merely an under-determined one; and secondly, an indeterminate theory cannot be viewed as issuing in statements true or false of the world. It may perhaps be the case that an indeterminate theory is under-determined and its under-determination remains even after some underdetermined theory has been chosen from each branch of science. Under-determination of any sort has been created where there remains floppy between **observation** and **theory**. However, indeterminacy is something different. It is created out of slippage between **total theory and theory**. According to Quine, in case of indeterminacy **linguistic theory** shares this fate; whereas in case of under-determination **natural science** shares this fate. Thus, the debate or dispute between Quine and Chomsky is to determine whether linguistic theory is one of the natural sciences or not. In this regard, Thomas Ricketts says, “The disagreement between Quine and Chomsky is not a clash of rival theories addressed to the same data but a difference over what counts as data, over the terms we take for granted to represent data.”⁸⁵ For Ricketts, Quine is primarily concerned with *human noise emission*; Quine is primarily concerned with a point only about evidence. Quine’s position here not belongs to ontology, but to the methodology of ontology. In this regard, it is in some sense or other linked with epistemology. We think Quine’s methodology of ontology cannot be fully detached from epistemology. It is indeed reflected in his remarks when he says that “we can investigate the world, and man as part of it, and thus find out what cues he could have of what goes on around him. Subtracting his cues from his world view, we get man’s net contribution as the difference. This difference marks the extent of man’s conceptual sovereignty – the domain within which he can revise theory while saving data.”⁸⁶ One may acquire or learn observation sentences through theoretical language. In this way, observation leads evidence to scientific

⁸⁵ Ricketts, T., “Rationality, Translation, and Epistemology Naturalized”, *Journal of Philosophy*, LXXIX, 3 (March 1982), p. 136.

⁸⁶ Quine, W. V. O., *Word and Object*, op. cit., p. 5.

theory. This is how a ‘vital’ partnership between the theory of language and the theory of scientific evidence is made possible.

Quine inclines to say that within the realm of indeterminacy *there is no fact of the matter* on the basis of which one comes to know which translation manual happens to be correct or incorrect. In this context, Quine says, “The intended notion of fact of the matter is not transcendental or yet epistemological … it is ontological, a question of reality, and to be taken naturalistically within our system of the world.”⁸⁷ Why does Quine rule out the relevance of epistemology in indeterminacy? According to Quine, it would be a mistake if one assumes of indeterminacy as an epistemological matter. It seems to us that Quine very often talks in favour of linguistic evidence or data and methods. Even in his *Word and Object*, Quine speaks in favour of the *objective data*⁸⁸ and of possible data and methods. He persists with the same even in his *Pursuit of Truth*⁸⁹. In this regard, he also speaks in favour of linguist’s methods. One can also involve with tentatively identifying and translating observation sentences and then make an attempt to identify analogous of our logical constants by considering utterances made of two or more observation sentences. Besides, one may also take the help of *analytical hypothesis* through which one can come to know about how utterances may be analyzed into units towards forming or constructing new sentences. Thus, for Quine, translation manual always requires a highly schematized account of the procedures. Of course, Quine adopts heuristic reasons to talk in terms of linguist’s evidence or data even though he denies the relevance of epistemology in indeterminacy. In fact, we notice ontological question instead of epistemological question when the whole truth about

⁸⁷ Quine, W. V. O., “Things and Their Place in Theories”, in W. V. Quine, *Theories and Things*, op. cit., p. 23.

⁸⁸ Quine, W. V. O., *Word and Object*, op. cit., p. 28.

⁸⁹ See Quine, W. V. O., *Pursuit of Truth*, op. cit., p. 38.

the world would not suffice to settle the issue. The questions: what counts as a ‘truth about the world’ here? What are the facts? These questions are not epistemological, they are ontological.

Translation manual is indeterminate because there always creates a gulf between *the evidence of the linguist and the facts about what dispositions speakers of the given language have*. This gap creates *ordinary inductive uncertainty* according to Hylton, but it does not appear as disquiet to Quine. It has already been noted that Quine is more interested to envisage his linguist at the beginning along with what is observable and what can be inferred from the ordinary uses of scientific method. He does not put any question to the use of scientific method. As a result of that, it can be said that the gap created out of inductive certainty of the linguist and the facts does not give rise to indeterminacy. Instead of this, the so-called indeterminacy is concerned with the gap between the *facts and the transition* in which the question whether the facts be sufficient to determine a unique translation manual concerns the most. Thus, only sorts of facts are relevant to Quine, because only facts of nature bear the correctness of translation. That is where Quine remarks that only mutually incompatible manuals of translation conform to all the same overall states of nature. This position of Quine reminds us his alleged behaviourism. It would be difficult to recognize Quine as a behaviourist, but many would say that Quine is an alleged behaviourist. In fact, Quine elsewhere in his many writings admits the relevance of behaviourism in linguistics. He goes on to say that ‘in linguistics one has no choice’, but to be a behaviourist. This position is particularly relevant in case of acquisition of language, i.e., in case of how language is learnt. As far as acquisition of language is concerned, there we observe a considerable debate between mentalist and behaviourist. Chomsky, for example, claims that acquisition of language is mental, inner. In this regard, Chomsky brings back the relevance of innatism expounded by Descartes long back. Following Descartes, Chomsky actually introduces

a new form of innatism. He claims that every normal child at the time of his or her birth biologically acquires a mental organ in the left hemisphere from where language is being generated spontaneously. He then calls it **Transformation Generative Grammar (in short TGG)**. He also calls it scientific grammar having deep and surface structure. Contrary to Chomsky, the behaviourist holds that one can acquire or learn language from external sources. Quine being an alleged behaviourist remarks, “Each of us learns his language by observing other people’s verbal behaviour and having his own faltering verbal behaviour observed and reinforced or corrected by others.”⁹⁰ Thus, we notice a diametrically opposite position taken by both Quine and Chomsky. This debate is philosophically a fascinating context. We will come back to this issue when we compare Quine with Chomsky at later stage. At this juncture, we, following Quine, can say that there remains nothing in linguistic meaning ‘beyond what is to be gleaned from overt behaviour in observable circumstances’⁹¹. We understand Quine as a radical empiricism because of his development of natural epistemology. Accordingly, it is natural for Quine to adhere with the perception that ‘our information about the world comes only through impacts on our sensory receptors’⁹². This position of Quine in some sense or other influences others, particularly, the linguist. Learning of language, Quine says, is an inter-subjective transition among linguistic community. Here getting the mastery over language matters the most. Thus, there is nothing wrong to claim after Quine that indeterminacy is a sort of claim that mutually irreconcilable manuals of translation can conform to all the same behavioural dispositions. Such behavioural disposition, Quine says, are nothing but the only facts of nature that bear on the correctness of translation.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., p. 19.

3.7 Indeterminacy of Reference

So far we have outlined the idea of indeterminacy after Quine. Quine initially was in favor of **holophrastic indeterminacy**. Holophrastic indeterminacy is a kind of indeterminacy which gives more importance of the translation of whole sentence instead of indeterminacy of reference. However, this does not make sense to assume that Quine was not interested regarding **indeterminacy of reference**. Reference always plays an important role in any form of language. In this sequel we mainly focus on **indeterminacy of reference** after Quine. We think that Quine's concept or idea of indeterminacy of reference is more perceptible than holophrastic indeterminacy and one can adequately defend it by citing concrete examples. Accordingly, it would be natural to focus on indeterminacy of reference first. The immediate question is: how does the indeterminacy of reference come about? We think that a suitable answer of this question can be found in Quine's perception of contextual meaning. Unlike the referential semantists, Quine was in favour of contextual meaning. The reason is simple. As a naturalist epistemologist Quine cannot rule out the context while interpreting meaning. As we know that the problem of meaning in some sense or other is associated with reference. The reference of a sentence makes the sentence either true or false, or in short, meaningful. Even at times, one may ascribe meaning to sub-sentential parts of language. The principle of compositionality as expounded by Frege is a case in point. Quine in this regard says that “words ... owe their meaning to their role in sentences.”⁹³ Words, according to Quine, do not have any independent meaning. This clearly suggests that Quine was in favour of holistic interpretation of meaning where priority of sentence meaning over word meaning has been recognized. According to Quine, it is natural to say that ascriptions of meaning are accountable only to the use of sentences, where the sentence can

⁹³ Ibid., p. 37.

adequately be used correctly or incorrectly without linguistic context. Thus, Quine very often is interested to find out the distinction between ascriptions of meaning to sentences and ascription of meaning to sub-sentential units of language. The meaning of sub-sentential language can be ascribed more than one ways to ascribe the meaning to sentences. However, the correctness or incorrectness can only be ascribed in the case of sentential meaning, but in no way in the case of sub-sentential units of language. Having said this, it can be assumed after Quine that if the meanings of sub-sentential units of language are fully compatible with ascriptions of meaning to sentences, then in such a case there is nothing wrong to assume the meanings of sub-sentential units of language as correct.

Even though we are talking of correctness or incorrectness about the ascription of meaning to sentences and also address the issue of compatibility and incompatibility while determining the meaning of language, but still it should be kept in mind that the functionality of language is being progressed within the horizon of indeterminacy. Many would perhaps be shaky enough about the indeterminacy of language because of its ambiguity. Quine does not belong to this camp. According to Quine, indeterminacy of language is a natural phenomenon of language and there is nothing wrong. Having said this, attempt should be made to talk of meaningless vague. According to the referential semantics, the fundamental relation between language and the word or reality is based on referential relation. We notice the same in early Wittgenstein. According to Wittgenstein, a proposition pictures a fact. The parts of proposition are names and the parts of fact, if there be any, are objects. A name denotes or refers to an object. Thus, the relationship between language and worlds are the relationship between the constituents of proposition and the constituents of fact. Wittgenstein has established this relationship with the help of *pictorial form*. Quine does not agree with this sort of interpretation of language developed by the whole host of

semantics. Unlike the semantics school, Quine inclines to say that the relationship is not between the name and object, rather between **sentences and sensory stimulations**. Thus, in a sense, Quine in this regard adheres to the behaviourist account of language. Quine finds the insight of his theory in the case of observation sentences.

According to Quine, observation sentences are **unstructured**. Such sentences acquire the meaning with regard to their relation to sensory stimulation. Quine strongly denies any ontological feasibility in proto-observation sentences. Proto-observation sentences are incapable to refer because reference, according to Quine, is more complex than anything going on that level. Reference requires pronouns, plural endings, copulas of identity and of predication, the contrast between singular and general terms. These linguistic contents are not present in proto-observation sentences. According to Quine, observational sentences can be referential if such sentences become an integral part of more sophisticated theory containing identity, plurals, and so on.

It, thus, seems to us that Quine conceives different types of observation sentences, such as, fully fledged observation sentences and other than fully fledged observation sentences. He then goes on to say that fully fledged observation sentences are part of more sophisticated theory. They desire to have ontological claims. This does not make the sense to say that Quine denies his earlier position of stimulus response theory. His theory of meaning undoubtedly is based on stimulus response. In this regard, it can be said that fully fledged observation sentences are in some sense or other linked with observation sentences based on stimulus response. Such links, Quine says, consist ultimately in ‘the conditioning of sentences as responses to sentences as

stimuli'.⁹⁴ Thus, as far as stimuli response is concerned, Quine remained uncontroversial in his own position. According to Quine, two sorts of factors are relevant to the correct use of language and to meaning. First, the links between sentences and sensory stimulation cannot be evaded. Secondly, the sorts of links one can precept among sentences had already been specified in the previous paragraph. As far as indeterminacy of reference is concerned, these two factors deal with sentences. As a result of that, it can be said that sub-sentential units impose no independent constraint upon an account of language. Thus, following Quine, we can say that the so-called semantic account of sub-sentential components may not be treated basic. Rather 'it is derivative upon the semantic account of complete sentences.'⁹⁵

As a proponent of holistic interpretation of meaning, Quine intends to say that it may perhaps be the case that the ability to understand and produce sentences which we have never heard before completely depends upon our combining sub-sentential parts of language. These sub-sentential parts of language in some sense or other are familiar to us from its use in other sentences. Let us make this point more explicit. For example, a logical connection between sentences may be thought of as summing up infinitely many facts of the form. In most general cases, when it is appropriate to assert those sentences, it would equally be apposite to assert this one. This process, of course, is not the process where we can examine one after another. Rather we examine it on the basis of the *logical form* of the sentence under consideration. Of course, in the case we attribute forms to sentences. As the meaning of sub-sentential parts of language is derivative upon the meanings of sentences, reference of the sentence, according to Quine, would equally be derivative upon the meanings of sentences. As a result of that there is no point in saying after Quine that the referential aspect of meaning is basic in the real sense of the term.

⁹⁴ Quine, W. V. O., *Word and Object*, op. cit., p. 11.

⁹⁵ Hylton, P., *Quine*, op. cit., p. 206.

Nor we can say that the same is given. Rather it is safe for us to assume that the referential aspect of language is constructed or derivative. In this regard, Quine says, “Reference and ontology recede thus to the status of mere auxiliaries. True sentences, observational and theoretical, are the *alpha and the omega* of the scientific enterprise. They are related by structure, and objects figure as mere nodes of the structure. What particular objects there may be is indifferent to the truth of observation sentences, indifferent to the support they lend to theoretical sentences, indifferent to the success of the theory in its predication.”⁹⁶

Why does Quine think that reference is indeterminate? Quine, we think, finds indeterminacy of reference because for him reference is derivative. There is more than one way that reference could be derived. Thus, we do not have the fixity of reference. There is no point in saying that referential connection with regard to denotation or with regard to connotation is the only way to determine the meaning of linguistic expression. Nor can we say that the reference of an expression would remain the same all without exception. It is to be noted here that when we talk of reference, we certainly talk of with regard to objects. As the world is the totality of objects, objects are supposed to the basic constituents or fabric of the world. However, the role of objects is not as much important in epistemology than and semantics. According to Quine, objects are secondary in epistemology but primary in semantics. There are alternative ways of assigning reference; naturally there are number of ways through which the reference of an expression can be demonstrated. In this regard, Quine introduces the idea of a *proxy function*. What does it mean? It means that the reference of a sentence or proposition is determined on the basis of *one to one function*. Here a new sentence would be reconstructed on the basis of the original version under any circumstances without being compromised the truth value. In modal logic we can

⁹⁶ Quine, W. V. O., *Pursuit of Truth*, op. cit., p. 31.

construct a theorem with the help of transformational rules that can be applied on any given axiom. Now, the theorem must preserve the same truth-value of the axioms from which it has been constructed. The ***proxy-function*** is a sort of sentence to sentence connection and it makes no difference between the original sentence and the reconstructed sentence under consideration. In proxy-function, the original sentences and the reconstructed ones are not two different languages, rather one language described in two different ways. However, at the level of constituent parts, one may find notable difference. For example, ‘Rover’ is the name of dog. The point is that does ‘Rover’ refer to the family pet or other than family pet. Let us try to cognize this issue with regard to translation. There may be more than one translation of a sentence but it there remains unsettleability to which of the translation is correct. Thus, unsettleability of translation, according to Quine, is supposed to be an intrinsic feature of indeterminacy of translation. Many would say that indeterminacy is an inability to dig out some fact, but Quine thinks the other way round. According to Quine, it would be prudent enough to presume that ‘there is no fact to be got at’.

In this regard, one may relate *indeterminacy of reference* with *ontological reduction* because they are in some sense or other relies on a technique of mapping objects which can serve the same function. However, unlike superficial similarities, the differences between them are more prominent. Indeterminacy of reference, according to Quine, actually hinges more *on internal mapping within a given ontology*. As a result of that, ‘reference would seem now to become nonsense not just in radical translation but at home’.⁹⁷ Ontological reduction, on the other hand, is primarily concerned with the relationship between two ontologies.

⁹⁷ Quine, W. V. O., *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*, op. cit., p. 47.

According to Quine, translation of language is the only manual through which one can understand other. In this regard, first person meaning of language holds the upper hand. It would indeed be a matter of translation through which one comes to know the utterance of others. But the problem is that if translation manual is taken to be the only way of understanding the expression of others, then it would lead to an endless regress. To avoid such endless regress, we have to have some other kind of understanding of language which does not require translating manual. In this regard, one may think of private language as an obvious candidate. In this regard, we may remember Ayer. According to Ayer, there are some basic propositions which are exclusively to the person concerned which does not require further interpretation or verification. Carnap called such statement ‘protocol statement’. They are exclusively private in nature. Thus, it may be said that the so-called real meaning actually hinges in my language. If it does, then the only way to comprehend the language of someone else actually hinges on to translate the language of others into my language. However, it rests on a presupposition. The presupposition is that here the linguist, being an inventor of first person meaning, has to have the full mastery over language. In a situation like this, the linguist might think that within the sphere of radical translation the meaningfulness of the target language actually depends on the translation with regard to the real meaning of his own language. Thus, in a sense, it may be presumed that the so-called radical translation is nothing but an indirect approach to meaning. Here one thing should be kept in mind that Quine does not interpret indeterminacy from epistemological sense, because radical translation manual is no way associated with the claim or justification of knowledge. Instead of epistemological sense, Quine perhaps interprets it in terms of ontological sense. Here Quine was more pronounced to talk of linguistic evidence. The radical translation does not tell us about what meaningfulness is; rather it tells us only how the linguist can come to know the

meaning of another language by way of translating it. Translation of one language by means of another language does not make sense to say that we do not give importance of the face value of language. The first thing is that translation is made possible within our mother language. Here translation means different ways of paraphrasing within the same language. This is how we can understand the language of others. It may perhaps be the case that even within the same linguistic community one may not understand the language of other. In such a case one would respond to the other what he said. Thus, to understand someone's utterances is not in the usual case to translate them; rather it is simply to be predisposed to respond to them in appropriate ways. Quine says, "In practice we end the regress of background languages by acquiescing in our mother tongue and taking its words at face value".⁹⁸ Thus, to know about the meaning of other's words is simply to know our use of them. To know we do use the words of other is to know the meaning of other words or language. But what kinds of uses are relevant? In this regard, Quine certainly deny the mentalist terms of meaning. In this regard, one can find the philosophical debate between Chomsky and Quine regarding the acquisition of language. Chomsky being an interpreter of mentalistic tradition would like to say that one can acquire language by means of innate ideas. The acquisition of language, according to Chomsky, is innate. Quine thinks the other way round. As a proponent of physicalism, Quine thinks that one can acquire language from external sources.

Thus, the use of language is more important than our translating of it. In fact, to take the words of our language 'at face value' is not to attribute special meanings to them. It is simply using them instead of asking or seeking an explanation of their meaning. As far as our *use of language* is concerned, there is no issue of indeterminacy. A translation manual is a sort of linguistic

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 42.

device or practice in which one can translate the language of other in his *own way*. As far as reference is concerned, we do, of course, agree to take that ‘rabbit’ denotes rabbits. However, when we say that a term denotes, what we are asserting is simply part of our ordinary language. When we say that the sentence “‘Rabbit’ denotes rabbits”, the second use of the word ‘rabbit’ is an ordinary use. There is no point in saying that by way of accepting it, one transmits some sort of guarantee against indeterminacy of reference. According to Quine, within the sphere of home language (ordinary or native language), reference seems to be unproblematic as we observes in the case that ‘London’ denotes ‘London’ or ‘Rabbit’ denotes ‘Rabbits’. It would remain true even within the Tarskian paradigm. He then asserts that ‘**inscrutability of reference emerges only in translation**’.⁹⁹ Thus, for Quine, indeterminacy of reference is an integral association of translation manual. Here the behavioural potency of Quine is vividly expressed. To understand language of native speaker is nothing but the mastery of fluent expression of the translator of the language. The fluent speaker of language comes to know the meaning of language in proper. In this regard Quine remarks that ‘knowing what expressions mean *consists*, for me, in being disposed to use them on appropriate occasions.’¹⁰⁰ The user of language sometimes knows better what he actually means than others do. Even if one says something ambiguously, he comes to know in what sense he is intended to say. In the speaker-hearer linguistic communication, ambiguity if there be any appears in most general cases to the hearer. The speaker even in the ambiguous communication is very much aware of the sense he intended to say.

⁹⁹ Hahn, L. E. and Schilpp, P. A., (eds.), *The Philosophy of W. V. Quine*, op. cit., p. 460.

¹⁰⁰ Orenstein, A. and Kotatko, P., (eds.), *Knowledge, Language and Logic*, op. cit., p. 420.

3.8 Arguing For and Against of Indeterminacy

There are many philosophical arguments already developed *for and against* of Quine's famous theory indeterminacy of translation. Quine's concept of indeterminacy of translation actually appeared as *a philosophical peril* to dismantle many well established philosophical theories. It goes against First Philosophy. It paves the way of conceptual relativism. However, this does not make the sense to say that his theory is free from begging questions. Many criticisms have already been laid on against Quine's theory of indeterminacy of translation. In this sub-section we try to explicate the arguments developed *for and against* Quine's theory of indeterminacy of translation. It seems to us that in his later work Quine was in favour of *hypothetical status* of indeterminacy of translation. It is one of the decisive philosophical positions that Quine has adhered to. However, many commentators expressed their serious reservation regarding this philosophical position of Quine. Before Quine, it has been stated that there is not more than *one way* of satisfying it. Quine denies it. He does not think that there is only one monolithic way on the basis of which translation manual functions. If it does, then it would be treated as an *unexamined notion of synonymy* which entails uniqueness of translation. According to this view, uniqueness of translation is overwhelmingly the most reasonable and plausible view. Kant in the past developed the concept of analyticity with the help of this model of translation. We also notice the impact of Kant in post Kantian philosophical thought. Even the radical semanticists stake the opportunity of uniqueness of translation as the plausible view. However, Quine thinks the other way round. Quine has clearly stated that there is no point to accept or adopt an undefined notion of synonymy in translation manual. In fact, the genesis of translation does not rest on an unexamined notion of synonymy; rather the very philosophical objective of translation is to facilitate smooth interaction in a diverse ways. **Quine claims that if there is one way of**

translation according to classical or traditional epistemologists, then there is nothing wrong in presuming that there is more than one way of translational manual. In this way, Quine offers us the concept of *holophrastic indeterminacy* of translation that has been accepted by the linguistic as *radical translation*. Thus, by introducing holophrastic indeterminacy, Quine actually offers us the possibility of manifold ways of translation. If translation is to be monolithic then surely it would be determinate. But for Quine, translation is indeterminate.

Quine in his book *Word and Object* offers us a systematic account of the idea of indeterminacy. He says that the task of the linguist is to recuperate man's current language from his currently observed responses. In this regard, the linguist collect all the objective data as the forces to reveal native 'meanings' based on stimulus responses. In this process, the linguist 'ends up with native 'meanings' in some quite unrestricted sense ... of all possible native sentences.'¹⁰¹ Here Quine bangs on the stimulus meaning of native utterances. Stimulus meaning, according to Quine, 'may be properly looked upon ... as the objective reality that the linguist has to probe when he undertakes radical translation.'¹⁰² Here translation of observation sentences seems prominence towards acquiring stimulus meaning. In his *Roots of Reference*, Quine equally puts emphasize on 'verdict functions' or popularly known as truth-functions. On the basis of 'verdict-functions', one may come to know whether two or more 'stimulus-synonymous' would fall under the same verdict in any given stimulus conditions. This assessment would be prerequisite to find out the distinction between sentences which are 'stimulus-analytic' and sentences which are 'stimulus contradictory'. Such facts, Quine thinks, actually 'cover all the available evidence'¹⁰³. In this regard, Quine introduces a new system of method known as 'analytical hypotheses'. Such

¹⁰¹ Quine, W. V. O., *Word and Object*, op. cit., p. 28.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 39.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 70.

hypotheses actually require the linguist to analyze utterances and to attribute significance to their parts. Thus, analytical hypotheses are answerable to evidence. However, when we say that indeterminacy is true, they are not hypotheses in the ordinary sense because in such a case they are not answerable to evidence. ‘They exceed’, Quine says, ‘anything implicit in any native’s dispositions to speech-behaviour.’¹⁰⁴ Within the sphere of indeterminacy of translation, Quine enables to accommodate rival systems of analytic hypotheses which are associated with equally successful manual of translation. The advantage of indeterminacy of translation is that once the translation was in place and one happens to know any part of it, he almost is certain to duplicate it rather than come up with a genuine alternative. This will open up more than one possible analytic hypothesis. In this process one has only to reflect on the nature of possible data and methods to appreciate the indeterminacy. Quine also narrates the same in his *Pursuit of Truth*. Here Quine says, “These reflections leave us little reason to expect that two radical translators, working independently on Jungle, would come out with interchangeable manuals.”¹⁰⁵

The same is being reflected in the case of under-determination because such theory by evidence tells us that more than one theory is compatible with a given set of observation sentences. That means in Quine’s model we can reasonably ascribe more than one theory to the speakers of the target language. According to Quine, any translation will be as correct as any other, so long as the net empirical implications of the theory as a whole are well-kept-up in translations. Accordingly, there is no point in saying which of two glaringly unlike translations of individual sentences is right. The other notable flexibility of Quine’s theory of indeterminacy is that it takes holophrastic indeterminacy in the same way as indeterminacy of reference. Indeterminacy, Quine says, is ‘a conflict of parts seen without the wholes’. In the case of indeterminacy of reference,

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Quine, W. V. O., *Pursuit of Truth*, op. cit., p. 47.

the whole were sentences and the parts were sub-sentential. However, in the case of holophrastic indeterminacy, the whole is ***our total theory*** and the parts are ***individual sentences***. Holism thus shows that it is only our theory *as a whole* that is answerable to evidence towards determining the true unit of empirical meaning. Very similar way, indeterminacy arises because there is more than one way that the meaning of the whole can be shared out among the parts. Thus, one may think that Quine comes to think of indeterminacy as a conjecture. Thus, there are considerable advantages underlying in Quine's theory of indeterminacy of translation.

This does not, however, make sense to say that Quine's theory of indeterminacy is free from begging questions. Many criticisms have been raised against Quine's theory of indeterminacy of translation. The first kind of objection claims that Quine while developing his theory of indeterminacy ignores facts which are extremely relevant. By doing so, Quine leaves out something essential. According to Quine, nothing seems to be relevant in the context of this theory which at least is not available to the translator. In this regard, he asserts that there is nothing in linguistic meaning beyond what is to be gleaned from overt behaviour in observable circumstances. It is indeed true to say that only creatures with normal human generic endowment are capable of learning language to the relevant behaviour. Here only that legacy and the kind of brain that result from it, play a crucial role in language. We have complex higher order dispositions in the learning process. However, unlike Chomsky, Quine was non-committal whether such higher order dispositions themselves are innate or not. According to Chomsky, the higher order mental dispositions are innate. In this regard, Chomsky brings back the relevance of old innatism within the process of acquisition of language. Quine, contrary to Chomsky, does not admit innatism in the process of learning of language. However, he intends to say that in the process of learning of language the propensity to form them must be there. Thus, it has been

assumed that human beings **share an innate generic endowment** which plays a crucial role in their acquisition of language. However, the debate between Chomsky and Quine is centered whether the so-called innate generic endowment might determinate translation. Quine was not a firm believer of innatism. Quine is a physicalist. Naturally, he talks in favour of physical language. Quine inclines to say that even a full understanding of neurology would in no way resolve the indeterminacy of translation. Quine gives importance on observational data rather than an innate generic endowment even though he does not deny the relevance of an innate generic endowment. As a physicalist, Quine always insist on observational data. The point is that if Quine's observational data are being taken into account then surely a neurophysiological explanation will not determine translation. This position of Quine has been criticized by the internalists to a great extent. Quine intends to say that it would be the case that if translations are each attuned with all behaviour, then each of them would equally be attuned with any explanation of that behaviour provided that 'the description of what is to be explained is an acceptable term'. What counts relevance to Quine is not, of course explanation, but the linguistic data. In this regard, Quine remarks, "It disciplines data, not explanation."¹⁰⁶ Critiques, however, express serious reservation about Quine's position. As a proponent of linguistic behaviourism, Quine while developing this position does not find the relevance of level description. However, it may be argued that any account of language involves a level of description amalgamated between the behaviour and the brain. There is no question of doubt that the nerves system of different persons are different objects altogether. As a result of that a level of description is prerequisite to talk about what is common to all users of the language. There lies the relevance of a level of description what Quine does not anticipate while developing his position. Instead of an intermediate level of description, Quine talks of dispositions as a state of person's nervous

¹⁰⁶ Orenstein, A. and Kotatko, P., (eds.), *Knowledge, Language and Logic*, op. cit., p. 417.

system. However, it has been criticized by saying that there we hardly find any description of that state with regard to nerves and neurons. Quine, of course, does not think that we need anything of this sort towards creating our dispositions legitimate. Having said this, Quine may be criticized by saying that dispositions of any sort as anticipated by him ‘will play no role in determining translation’.

Secondly, it may be presumed that as far as indeterminacy is concerned Quine’s linguist is *too limited and narrow from methodological outlook*. Hookway raises question on the legitimacy of translation as conceived by Quine. In this regard, Hookway gives an example in terms of a maxim. He says, “A community is more likely to have terms for rabbits than for undetached rabbit parts or stages in their histories.”¹⁰⁷ A theory can be developed as a whole but not in a fragmented manner. Quine perhaps is too transparent as far as his theory of indeterminacy of translation is concerned. Quine in fact rules out any coerces while developing his theory of translation. As a **relativist conceptualist, physicalist** and **naturalized epistemologist**, Quine is not a believer of maxim. In fact, a maxim actually offers a sensible reason for preferring one manual of translation instead of another without giving any reason for thinking it true. However, it seems to Hookway that Quine’s approval of indeterminacy of translation actually hinges on a gulf between what is being justified by the physical facts and what serves our practical needs in looking for translation manual. Thus, in a sense, Quine in some sense or other offers merely a *subjective or pragmatic* approach while developing his theory of translation. This creates serious problem as far as understanding his theory is concerned. In fact, Quine within his paradigm perhaps unable to substantiate why one of two translation manuals is correct and the other is incorrect. Alternatively, it can be said that it would be difficult on the part of Quine to justify

¹⁰⁷ Hookway, C., *Quine* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), p. 135.

adequately why one translation manual may be accepted as correct and true and the other is not. According to Hookway, Quine perhaps would like to say that a manual may not be accepted so long it does not conform to stimulus meaning. If it does then it may perhaps be the case that two manuals satisfying the conditions set forth must be accepted as fully correct even though it may be the case that one manual is inferior than the other.

Peter Hylton, however, does not agree with Hookway. He claims that this is not the right way to read Quine. He seems this reading arbitrary and subjective at length. We think the concept of translation manual needs to be clarified first. We have to know under what condition a translation manual is to be correct. A translation manual is to be correct within the sphere of *fluent dialogue and successful negotiation*¹⁰⁸ with speakers of other language. If the concept of translation manual is conceived in this way then certainly, Hookway's position about Quine appears to be suspicious. Hylton further observes that Quine is right for not preconceiving any fixed maxim. Any maxim in the true sense of the term does not allow different or alternative interpretation or translation within the same level. In fact, within the paradigm of translation manual as conceived by Quine, the role of a fixed and determinate stringent maxim is nil. In this regard one may recall Kant. While developing the deontological approach of ethics, Kant put emphasized more on moral maxims which are universalizable and inviolable in nature. A moral maxim must be universalizable; otherwise it should not be treated as a moral maxim. The same will be noticed in the maxims of physics, logic, and geometry. As translation manual is naturalized, transparent and indeterminate, it does not work within the straight jacket of maxim. According to Hylton, to say that a linguistic community conforms to the maxim is to say that all acceptable translations of the language of that community obey the maxim. But this cannot be

¹⁰⁸ See Hylton, P., *Quine*, op. cit., p. 224.

the case as we have alternative translation manuals, violation of maxim cannot be ruled out. As Quine was in favour of *holophrastic indeterminacy*, he does not think to have a unique translation within the system. Even one cannot find a unique answer within the realm of translation manuals. The basic task of language is to communicate between the speaker and the hearers. This is the sole task of language. Quine's translational manuals allow us to communicate. However, communication may not be completely trouble-free communication because the communicators may have different belief systems or predisposed by some complex grammar. However, this does not vitiate the purpose of communication. The very intention of the communicators is to make their communication successful. Strawson in his book *Individuals* equally emphasized on successful communication between the communicators. However, Quine differs from Strawson in a big way. Quine is a conceptual relativist whereas Strawson was a proponent of uniform and a core conceptualist. Strawson, unlike Quine, advocates a uniform conceptualism possessed by all. In this regard, Strawson was influenced by Kant. Quine is critical about Kant's analyticity. In his 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism', Quine vehemently criticizes Kant. In this regard, Quine goes on to say that First Philosophy had been vitiated by stringent Dogmas. One famous dogma is associated with Kant on the basis of which Kant developed his theory of the distinction between analytic and synthetic judgments. Other dogma is associated with Carnap on the basis of which he developed reductionism. Quine was critical of such dogma based philosophical theories. Thus, in a sense, Quine goes against so many well established philosophical theories. He stands against Kant, Strawson, Carnap and Noam Chomsky each of which developed revolutionary philosophical theories. Thus, in a sense, Quine's philosophy has been treated as revolutionary because of its inextricable relationship with other well established philosophical theories.

Quine's theory does not allow us to have a determine theory because as a conceptual relativist and physicist. Quine tells us that any scheme of translation is underdetermined relative to the evidence for it. It would equally be true in the case of physics as well. It should however be kept in mind that while developing his theory, Quine's basic philosophical foundation is ontological rather than methodological or epistemological. On the basis of his ontological outlook Quine inclines to say that the totality of truth about the world fails to determine translation. As a result of that even the best theory of physics associated with the truth about the world remained to be underdetermined. When Quine reads something as 'equally good', he reads it in the methodological or epistemological sense where evidence and observation take the upper hand. However, he uses the same phrase from ontological sense. In replaying Chomsky, Quine affirms that theory in physics is an ultimate parameter in the sense that there is no legitimate first philosophy higher or firmer than physics. Being a physicalist, Quine considers physical facts as real facts. Accordingly, he emphasized on a physical conception of 'fact of the matter' in which he rules out the possibility of anything arbitrary and anything a priori in physical facts. Thus, the genesis of Quine's physicalism is that it enables to preserve its simplicity and its clarity within the realm of a physical conception of 'fact of the matter'.

3.9 Philosophical Significance of Indeterminacy of Translation

The philosophical significance of Quine's theory of indeterminacy of translation is revolutionary because of its positive and negative impact on other well established philosophical theories. Any philosophical theory approaches towards determinism. This is the genesis of philosophy. Quine's theory at least in its face value runs the other way round. As a result of that his theory 'has

become the most discussed of all his philosophical conclusions.¹⁰⁹ This theory works under two assumptions. First, translation manuals are underdetermined by the evidence very similar to the hypotheses used in science. Secondly, it implicitly inquires why translation manuals are not like hypotheses in the sciences. It then reveals that scientific hypotheses count as either true or false whereas the question of truth and falsity in the case of translation manuals simply does not arise. This position of Quine has been criticized by Chomsky and Rorty. Even though they along with Quine have accepted that translation is underdetermined but unlike Quine, they do not find any significant difference between translation manuals and scientific hypothesis.

In this regard one has to know about meaning. Meaning is defined in terms of verification, falsification or confirmation along with the line of logical positivism. Since translation has been accepted as under-determination there is no point in determining the meaning along with the line of principle of verification set forth by the logical positivists or referential semanticists. In fact, it is the translation of the whole sentence that matters the most instead of talking of the translation of the individual sentences. Thus, according to Quine, it bears no sense to correlate sentences that have same meaning while engaging with translation manuals. Moreover, as a proponent of **physicalism** Quine adheres to the view that meaning and other intentional entities are of no help in explaining what goes on in the physical world. From ontological point of view there we do not have any reason to assume that there are such intentional entities. In fact, Quine was in favour of the *death of meaning*. For Quine, linguistic philosophers have been almost totally wrong about meaning. Realistically, Quine's philosophical position is nearly tantamount to disbelieving in meaning. Quine denies the analytic-synthetic distinction because he presumes that there is nothing analytically true. The analytic-synthetic distinction does not resemble with red-orange

¹⁰⁹ Follesdal, D., "Volume Introduction", in D. Follesdall (ed.), *Indeterminacy of Translation (Philosophy of Quine)*, A Garland Series, New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc. 2001), p. xi.

distinction, rather it is a vague one. Therefore, there is no point in assuming that there is something true or false a priori or necessarily. The analytic-synthetic distinction is meaningless; nothing is analytic or analytically true. All truth or falsity is synthetic. Harman in this regard says, “Quine’s message is that the analytic-synthetic distinction, intensional objects or psychological states, meaning, and propositions, in short meaning as conceived by certain linguistic philosophers, all this, any of this, is no better off than witches, the ether, phlogiston, or God; and God is dead.”¹¹⁰ In Dummett phrase “the concepts of analyticity and syntheticity are spurious, on the ground that it is impossible to give non-circular definitions of the related terms.”¹¹¹ Even Quine denies the proposal of conventional truth. A conventionalist goes on to say that meaning determines on the basis conventional use of an expression. For example, ‘Copper is a metal’ is true by virtue of meaning or by virtue of convention. Quine, however, denies the position of conventionalism as he thinks that it would eventually lead to either circularity or an infinite regress.

The other philosophical implication of translation manual is that by way of developing this theory Quine goes on to deny that a sentence has a meaning or expresses a proposition. Quine inclines to say that an adequate account of desire, belief, etc., must treat psychological states as attitudes towards sentences rather than as attitudes towards propositions. For Quine, an adequate account of translation by no means is directed towards preserving meaning. Within the sphere of translation manuals there are no such intensional objects as meanings or propositions. This position of Quine not only goes against Kantian epistemology, it equally goes against the philosophical position of referential semanticists and logical positivists.

¹¹⁰ Harman, G., “Quine on Meaning and Existence, I”, *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹¹¹ Dummett, M., “The Significance of Quine’s Indeterminacy Thesis”, *Ibid.*, p. 99.

The pertinent question at this juncture is: how the determinacy of translation would enable us to make sense of the notion of proposition? To find a suitable answer of this question, one has to adhere to the concept of synonymous. If translations were determinate then in such a situation one could define two sentences as synonymous just in case the one is translated into the other by a fully acceptable translation between the language of the one and the language of the other. In such a case, a proposition would thus be a set of synonymous sentences. While replying to Alston, Quine says, “I keep urging that we could happily hypostatize meanings if we could admit synonymy. We could simply identify meanings with the classes of synonyms.”¹¹² Having said this, Quine thinks that the very idea of a set of synonymous expressions is extremely narrow relative to the idea of meanings and propositions used in analytic philosophy. In fact Quine was reluctant to conceive meaning with regard to truth and falsity. For Quine, there are other considerably better provisions to explain our understanding of language. One may conceive meaning in terms of thought, i.e., either as a mental entity or as an abstract entity. If meanings are mental, then they can be known by introspection. But the concept of introspection, according to Quine, is unscientific. If meanings are abstract entities, then they may be comprehended through epistemic contact between language users and meaning. In such a case, one may cognize an expression by way of grasping its meaning. This position was held by Frege and Russell as well. In either case there must be some epistemic relation between the speaker and the meaning. Now, if the meaning is a set of synonymous linguistic expressions, the matter would altogether be different. In fact, Quine thinks that meanings interpreted as sets of synonymous expressions do nothing at all to explain the understanding of language.

¹¹² Hahn, L. E. and Schilpp, P. A., (eds.), *The Philosophy of W. V. Quine*, op. cit., p. 73.