



IN DEFENSE OF THE IDEA OF DIFFERING
CONCEPTUAL SCHEMES.

A thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Arts.

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SUMMARY

In this essay we defend the idea of a different conceptual scheme by defending the following thesis.

DCS* It is possible that people from different linguistic backgrounds refer to each of a significant range of the entities they perceive using singular terms which differ in denotation from the singular terms we would use to refer to those same entities if we were to perceive them, (and so have a partially different conceptual scheme from ours).

This will be done by answering objections to the idea of a different conceptual scheme, and giving examples of partially different conceptual schemes from ours.

1.1 A major argument against the idea of a different conceptual scheme is the denotation argument. It is this.

Step one. If a person has a different conceptual scheme from ours then he would refer to at least one entity he perceives using a singular term with a different denotation from the singular term we would use to refer to that same entity.

Step two. A necessary condition for a person to refer to an entity using a singular term is that the singular term he uses denotes the entity he is referring to.

Step three. Therefore it does not make sense to say that a person may refer to an entity using a singular term with a different denotation from the singular term we would use to refer to that same entity (for this would be to suppose that a person can refer to an entity using a term which does not denote it). (from step two)

Step four. Therefore it does not make sense to say that a person has a different conceptual scheme from ours. (from steps one and three)

1.2 Rescher argues that Step one of the denotation argument is incorrect. He formulates an idea of a conceptual scheme which does not involve the idea of referring to the same thing using singular terms with a different denotation, or having radically different beliefs about the same thing.

1.3 However, Step two of the denotation argument seems incorrect.

1.3.1 Donnellan distinguishes between referential and attributive uses of definite descriptions. If a definite description is used referentially, a speaker may refer to an object using a singular term which does not denote that object.

1.3.2 A speaker refers to a unique object in virtue of a causal chain of communication stretching from a perception of

the object to the referring use of the singular term and not in virtue of the object referred to fitting the description (or if the singular term is a proper name, the description(s) which the speaker takes to express the sense of the name). So a speaker refers to a unique object using a singular term, irrespective of whether the singular term the speaker uses denotes the object referred to.

2. Examples of how speakers from a different linguistic background from ours may come to refer to a significant range of the objects they perceive using singular terms with different denotations from the singular terms we would use to refer to those same objects if we were to perceive them, and so have a partially different conceptual scheme from ours.

2.1 Eliminative Materialists who replaced psychical (sensation) discourse with neurophysiological discourse would have a partially different conceptual scheme from ours.

2.2 Eliminative Phenomenalists who replaced physical object discourse with phenomenalist discourse would have a partially different conceptual scheme from ours.

3.1 A second argument against the idea of a different conceptual scheme is the translation argument.

Step (1) The association of having a language with having a conceptual scheme.

Step (2) The adoption of inter-translatability as a criterion for the identity of conceptual schemes.

Step (3) The adoption of translatability into a familiar tongue as the criterion of languagehood.

Step (4) For a certain form of activity to be a language it must be translatable into a familiar tongue, but for it to be associated with a different conceptual scheme it must fail of translatability. So the idea of a different conceptual scheme is a contradiction in terms.

3.2 Step (3) of the translation argument seems incorrect. Two languages may fail completely of inter-translatability. A language may fail completely of translatability into English. When Davidson says that the criterion of languagehood is translatability into a familiar tongue, he may mean that a certain form of activity can be known to be a language if and only if it is translatable into English. However this seems to be false, for we could formulate a theory of truth for a language, and hence know that it is a language, yet not be able to correctly interpret the language in English.

According to Davidson's theory of interpretation, to give a correct theory of truth for a language is to give a correct theory of interpretation for that language. However Davidson's theory of interpretation rests on the incorrect assumption that most of our beliefs must be true.

3.3 Step (2) of the translation argument seems incorrect. Two speakers may have alternative conceptual schemes yet their languages be inter-translatable.

3.4 In addition we could have evidence that people from a different linguistic background have a different conceptual scheme from ours and that a language is not translatable into ours.

STATEMENT

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma.

To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.

With thanks to John Gill for supervising me, Michael
Bradley for helpful criticisms of an earlier draft,
Tammy, Meg, Delyse, and Anna for the pens.