



Quine on Observation Sentence: A Philosophical Reflection

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ARTICLE TYPE	Research Article
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DATES	Received: 14.08.2026 • Reviewed: 09.09.2026 • Accepted: 13.09.2026
PUBLICATION DATES	October- December, 2026 (Vol.2, Issue. 4), pp.1-15
DOI	https://doi.org/10.65842/nbpa.v2.i4.001
PUBLISHER	North Bengal Philosophers Association

ABSTRACT

Being a naturalized epistemologist and radical conceptual relativist, Quine invokes the observation sentence instead of sentences to establish a direct relation between *input and output*. The main contention of this paper is to explore the philosophical insights of Quine's observation sentence as the foundation of his *naturalized epistemology*. Quine's concept carries both positive and negative implications. Positively, it sets the paradigm for his philosophical journey and introduces a dynamic interpretation of pragmatic philosophy that would set the tone for future philosophy. Negatively, it faces serious criticism from contemporaries such as Chomsky, Davidson and others. The strategy of this paper is to offer a simplistic account of Quine's observation sentence with philosophical reflection. Quine argues it differs radically from sentences in general in complexity and number, being tied to straightforward, specifiable dispositions to assent. Moreover, observation sentences are limited. The number of sentences that any given speaker acquires as observation sentences by direct conditioning to stimulation is quite small. This kind of learning proceeds sentence-by-sentence, while sentences in general cannot be learned one-by-one. Thus, Quine develops a behaviourist account of language acquisition through external behaviour, on the basis of which he denies any philosophical dogmas and, instead of traditional epistemology, invokes a naturalized epistemology backed up by natural science and common sense.

KEYWORDS: Disposition, Naturalized epistemology, Natural sciences, Observation sentence, Stimulation.

CITATION

Ahmed, H.A. (2026). Quine on Observation Sentence: A Philosophical Reflection. *NBPA Journal for Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences*, 2(4), 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.65842/nbpa.v2.i4.001>

1. Introduction:

This paper aims to explore the philosophical implications of Quine's observation sentence. For Quine, an observational sentence is based on two criteria: first, in relation to the individual, and second, in relation to the *social*. As far as *individual relation* is concerned, an observation sentence qualifies for a given speaker to assent to it in response to the same sensory conditions in the first place. As far as

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social relation is concerned, an observation sentence must command the same verdict across *all linguistically competent witnesses* to the same occasion. For example, ‘It is raining’ passes the test because any normal observer present at the same sight would respond similarly. Quine tied the concept of observation sentences to stimulus meaning in his work, *Word and Object* (1960). According to Quine, intersubjectivity is the hallmark of observation sentences. It is like a report or a private feeling and is in no way incidental, as it functions as shared cross-linguistic understanding. However, Quine does not claim that an observation sentence is completely immune to *collateral information*. In this regard, Quine says, “Observation sentences whose stimulus meaning varies none under the influence of collateral information may naturally be called observation sentences, and their stimulus meaning may without fear of contradiction be said to do full justice to their meaning” (Quine, 1960, p. 42). In stimulus analytic sentences, collateral information is everything and sensory stimulation nothing, whereas in observation sentences it is the other way around. An ideal observation sentence can be judged solely on the basis of current stimulation. Quine says, “The stimulus meaning of “Bachelor” cannot be treated as its “meaning” by any stretch of imagination, unless perhaps accompanied by a stretch of the modulus” (Quine, 1960, p. 42). Quine in this regard cites the example, “rabbit-fly”, i.e., a fly unknown to the linguist. A native who sees this fly in the grass might assent to ‘Gavagai’ not because a rabbit is visible, but because the fly signals that one is nearby. Here the linguist would misread the assent. That is why Quine speaks in favour of a *continuum of observability* instead of making a sharp boundary between observation and non-observation sentences.

Of course, Quine occasionally struggles with his definition of the all-important notion of an observation sentence, especially to make them bear out his commitment to language being a ‘social art’ (Quine, 1960, p. ix). This point has been raised by Gary Kemp (2022). Kemp, in his paper, reveals that it would be really difficult for Quine’s epistemology to satisfy the apparent demand presented by the social demand for knowledge. Kemp claims that the so-called notion of evidence that Quine argues for is not usable in serious epistemology. While developing his naturalistic epistemology, Quine perhaps borrows a linguistic surrogate. As an alternative to Quine’s concept of evidence, Kemp invokes ‘observational categories’ that would represent sentences like “Whenever it is

snowing, it is cold”. Of course, Kemp acknowledges that Quine’s term ‘empirical content’ for a theory is given by the totality of its observation categoricals (Quine: 1981b, p. 28; Quine, 1992, pp. 16-18). According to Gary Kemp, “Quine uses it not as a practical recommendation, but only for making precise philosophical sense of the path from sensory evidence to theory – *From Stimulus to Science*, to name his last book” (Kemp, 2022, p. 806).

However, after *Word and Object* (1960), Quine acknowledges this difficulty and took steps to circumvent it. In his works of the 1990s, Quine offered an evolutionary explanation of the intersubjective agreement of verdicts of observation sentences in terms of *pre-established harmony*. While speaking about ‘Language is a social art’, Quine intends to say that for him observation sentences should be conceived as those occasion sentences on which linguistically competent people agree – have the same dispositions to assent or dissent – upon witnessing the relevant occasion (Quine, 1992, p. 3). His position is linked with the Darwinian ground that there underlies a parallelism in our inborn standards of perpetual similarity. Normally we tend to display similar dispositions to respond to similar environmental stimuli. Such disposition equally aligns with the environment and, in this context, Quine uses the term ‘pre-established harmony of perception’ in the way Leibniz’s famous *doctrine of monads*.

Being a behaviourist, Quine claims that we are physical objects as well as subject to physical forces which, in some sense or other, give rise to stimulations of our sensory nerves from which we emanate sounds, or marks or gestures. This position of Quine deviates from the whole host of linguists as well as philosophers of language. Indeed, with the help of this philosophical position, Quine, being a critic, is able to deny so many well-established philosophical doctrines. For example, his “Two Dogmas of Empiricism” (Quine, 1951), in which one dogma is directed against Kant and the other goes against Carnap, is a case in point. Another philosophical demarcation that one can notice between Quine and Chomsky is this debate, which is highly fascinating as far as the acquisition of language is concerned. Chomsky argues that language is something innate, mental and internal. He thus argues in favour of the internalisation of language. Thus, for Chomsky, acquisition of language is primarily internal in nature. On the contrary, Quine denies Chomsky by claiming that acquisition of language is something external and it is

behaviouristic in nature. Unlike other philosophers, Quine criticises traditional epistemology and any other philosophical tradition fundamentally based on fixed, rigorous rules, principles, and structures. Instead of traditional epistemology, Quine invokes naturalized epistemology. Quine's perception of philosophy is all about the world, i.e., the natural world. Quine enables this with regard to his peripheral outlook on observation sentences.

Quine vehemently claims that our output, which contains gestures, marks, sounds, etc., is about the natural world, and thus it constitutes cognitive discourse. Here the relation between the input (sensory nerves) and output is clear and vivid, and it is the basis of cognitive language. Quine claims that the relation of sensory input to linguistic output is also the relation of theory to evidence. By illuminating this relation, Quine inclines to say that it would fulfil some of the aims of more traditional epistemology. He says, "...the evidential relation is virtually enacted, it would seem, in the learning of theoretical language" (Quine, 1975, pp. 74-75). Quine talks about cognitive language to give a response to observation sentences. He then claims that observation sentences are associated with our basic picture of the physical object subject to physical forces in physicalistic terms. Quine here envisages how one might come to the users of at least rudimentary cognitive language, and how that level of cognitive language might be answerable to sensory stimulations. Quine, however, confesses that one may take observation sentences merely as a beginning relative to the richness and complexity of our cognitive language. Therefore, it is essentially a prerequisite to extend beyond observation sentences. Quine questions how, on the basis of having mastery over observation sentences, one can learn the language in which more sophisticated knowledge is embedded. How does that kind of knowledge relate to observation sentences? How do we acquire our theory of the world? How do we refer to the enduring objects which constitute the world? One can find a suitable response after Quine with regard to observation sentences and beyond.

2. Hylton's Reflection:

What then is an observation sentence, according to Quine? In what sense does an observation sentence differ from the sentence that we use in grammar? According to Quine, an observation sentence completely differs from the grammatical sentence, as, unlike the latter, the former can be learned as a response to stimulation as an unstructured whole. Hylton (2007) argues that two more specific points are pertinent when we talk about observation sentences. *First*, the dispositions which must be acquired in order to learn a given observation are relatively straightforward. *Second*, the number of sentences that a child learns as observation sentences will be quite small. The sort of learning proceeds

sentence-by-sentence. In the case of a sentence, the main focus is on the learning of constructions, modes of forming sentences. When you have acquired those dispositions, you have learnt the sentence to a high degree. This is totally unlikely in the case of an observational sentence. This makes clear in what sense a sentence differs from an observational sentence according to Quine. In the case of a sentence, the input-output relation is less straightforward than in the case of an observation sentence. Hylton, following Quine, argues that one can formulate more advanced language on the basis of observational language. In this context, observational language is philosophically important. Quine says that the initial stage of observational language, which is without semantically significant structure, is called *proto-observation sentences*. One can acquire advanced language just by way of combining parts of observation sentences to form new sentences. Thus, it requires us to see observational sentences not as an unstructured whole but as made up of semantically significant parts. Thus, the relevance of observational sentences and observational language is clear, as it enables us to portray semantically significant structure. This, in turn, paves the way for designating it as *referential language*. A sentence as such cannot be regarded as referential, whereas observational language can be. There are other imminent issues that need to be taken care of. At times, we cannot rule out the possible looseness in the dispositions to assent and dissent. Now, the point is that if we cannot specify the dispositions associated with the given sentences, we can hardly hope to say how those dispositions might be acquired.

The pertinent question is, of course, how they come to refer to things? What is it for some of the noises in the output to refer, to be about particular objects? According to Hylton, here Quine's emphasis is chiefly on learning. He is concerned to show how something recognisable as reference could arise, given the basic input-output picture. If we accept, for the sake of logic, that an account of the mastery of observation sentences can be fitted into that picture, then again the question is how an infant equipped only with observation sentences might acquire the ability to refer. In this regard, Quine introduces the concept of holism and then argues that the relation between holism and the learning of language goes both ways. But Quine needs to give an account that shows how holism could arise, how a holistic language could be learnt. Holism cannot overcome the looseness in the dispositions. In response, Quine says that the learner's progress in acquiring language "is not a continuous derivation, which, if followed backwards, would enable us to reduce scientific theory to sheer observation. It is a progress by short leaps of analogy" (Quine, 1975, pp. 78-79).

3. Epistemology, not Grammar:

Quine concerns are epistemological, as it is a matter of how our sentences come to make claims about the world, and how we acquire such cognitive language. His interest is not in the child's developing sense of grammaticality or how the child comes to learn. His aim is to indicate how the child might be in a position to begin to form judgments. Here, determining the grammatical meaning is not important; rather, its truth, or its plausibility in the given circumstances. In this regard, Hylton remarked, "When Quine talks of accounting for the child's acquiring the ability to use relative clauses, say, it is that sort of ability that he is talking about: the ability to use the construction to make utterances that the rest of us accept as true, or at least as plausible" (Hylton, 2007, p. 153).

It thus seems that Quine is interested in observation sentences instead of sentences, as his aim continues to be knowledge of the natural world rather than of grammar. This is unlikely in the case of sentences in general. Quine says, "In learning to understand and use the observation sentences, we depended very directly on truth-value considerations; for this learning consisted simply in learning the circumstances in which to assent to or dissent from the sentences. Coming to eternal sentences, we noticed with some misgivings that this approach was no longer suitable, because of the fixity of the truth values. But now we see that the variability of truth value has withdrawn merely to a higher level of abstraction. A predication may be saddled with one truth value for all eternity; the predication mode of composition, however, takes on varying truth values, yielding truth for some pairs of terms and falsity for others. *First and last, in learning language, we are learning how to distribute truth values.* ... In learning the eternal predication construction, we are learning how to judge whether a given pair of terms produces a true predication, true for good, or a false one, false for good" (Quine, 1974, p. 65). Quine's position goes against internalists, particularly Chomsky. Chomsky acknowledges that language is the mirror of mind and that language is internal. It is governed by the structure of grammar. By acknowledging that language is innate, Chomsky revives old innatism as expounded by Descartes and others. Descartes and others find the relevance of innate ideas in the field of traditional epistemology, whereas Chomsky finds the relevance of it in the case of the acquisition of language. Thus, it can be said that Descartes' innatism is old and Chomsky's innatism is new. Quine not only criticises Chomsky; his view certainly goes against the epistemological foundation developed by the rationalists, including Descartes. Quine, instead of traditional epistemology, invokes naturalized epistemology deeply associated with natural science and common sense.

Quine's contention was about how to acquire knowledge, and his interest in language and its acquisition is derivative. Quine claims that the number of sentences with

which we are concerned is definitely large. He prefers observation language for the sake of naturalized epistemology. He denies eternal language or protocol language as expounded by Ayer and Carnap; instead, he invokes a general account of how sentences tell us something about the sort of epistemic evidence well supported by natural science and common sense. Quine in this regard invokes *language-dependent learning of language*, i.e., “learning that depends on other locutions previously learned” (Quine, 1974, p. 48). It does not make sense to assume that here Quine acknowledges Chomsky; rather, he intends to say that this kind of learning still depends on the learner’s standard of similarity, again an observational and behavioural process. Thus, for Quine, language-dependent learning facilitates the learning of observation sentences, rather than taking us beyond them in principle. Quine also raises other similar cases. One is the learning of something analogous to truth-functions – *conjunction*, *disjunction*, and *negation*. Hylton argues after Quine that one can easily imagine that once the child has learnt a few observation sentences, he will also be able to learn that it is appropriate to utter one, followed by “and”, followed by another in just those similar circumstances. Disjunction and negation are analogous. Quine points out that what is initially learnt is what he calls a *verdict function* rather than a truth-function. A sentence may be true or false, but there are three possible verdicts on an observation sentence: *assent*, *dissent*, and *abstain*. Thus, we have a three-valued logic. Another kind of learning is what Quine calls *analogical synthesis*. Analogical synthesis enlarges the child’s stock sentences of an elementary sort. Its significance goes far beyond this fact. It is a technique that combines parts of previously learned sentences to form new sentences that are not unstructured wholes. Here the technique relies on the child’s being able to break the sentence down into significant parts and recombine those parts in novel ways. It is crucial at every level of language, including the level of observation sentences.

4. Language Learner’s Progress:

Quine then illuminates the *language-learner’s progress*. According to Quine, it is not continuous derivation; instead, it is progress by short leaps of analogy. Language learning in general progresses in this way: what is learned is holistic language. We envisaged the sentence first being learnt in the garden, but then used in other contexts, where its truth or falsehood is no longer evident. This kind of thing happens constantly in language learners’ progress. For example, ‘It is raining’ is an observation sentence. But ‘It’s raining in London’, said somewhere else, is not an observation sentence. In the latter case, the evidence is indirect. Quine’s position is that once the child masters idioms of time and

tense, they too will give rise to similar cases: “It will rain next week” is not answerable to current evidence, as it will require a good deal of rather specialised language of the world. “Yellow paper” may be learnt as a kind of compound of two observation sentences, and then “This paper is yellow” may be learnt as an equivalent form. That is *occasional predication* that is true or false from occasion to occasion. Quine claims such a sentence is directly associated with stimulation almost in the way that an observation sentence is. However, *eternal predications* are a different matter as they are true once for all, or false once for all. For example, ‘Snow is white’ or ‘Fido is a dog’. Even grammatically, they are similar: ‘Fido is wet’ and ‘Fido is a dog’. But Quine is not concerned about grammar, but epistemology. Quine envisages a child who has already mastered ‘Snow’ and ‘White’ as observation sentences. That is, he has the appropriate dispositions to assent and dissent. Here the child has been conditioned to assent to the query ‘White?’ when snow is presented, and then this response becomes transferred from the snow stimulus to the associated verbal stimulus, the word ‘snow’ (Quine, 1974, p. 65). Quine remarks, “Having learned the term “animal”, the child is disposed to assent to the query “An animal?” if he surmises the presence of dogs or other animals. Then, by transfer, he comes to assent to “An animal?” on hearing the words “A dog”. He assents to “A dog is an animal” (Quine, 1974, p. 66).

5. The Paradigm of Learning Process:

This process of learning is primarily behaviouristic in nature. There is no issue of internalisation of language in the line of Chomsky. Thus, for Quine, language learning is just like the *trial-and-error* method system through external physical behaviour. Quine claims that the child who comes to express a number of sentences of the given kind quickly catches on to the general technique of forming such sentences, and in the process he can learn the predicative mode of composition in one case and the universal categorical in the other. The role of the observation sentence is the key in forming the predicative mode of composition because such a mode of composition always ensures what is to be the case and not to be the case. The child assents “Snow is white” on the basis of having seen a few instances of snow. This claim is far from conclusive evidence, as once the child masters the general construction where one term is predicated for another, he may proceed further based on which the sentence he utters can be reasonably asserted. Of course, such assertion on the part of the child may not be at par with the competent language-user, but the child, of course, does part of what the fully competent language-user can do. The initial learning of the child is only partial as it gives him at most a very limited grasp of the circumstances which make assent and dissent to a given sentence appropriate. However, the point at this juncture is that his usage is subject to encouragement and correction by others, which

would help the learning process. According to Quine, here the child's ability to use the sentence as adults do is subject to his absorbing various connected parts of our general theory of the world. In this regard, Quine holds that beyond the observation sentence, language mastery, like the evidence relation, is holistic. This is how Quine narrates the process of language learning beyond the observation sentences.

6. Observation Sentence and Reference:

Quine argues that the capacity to use observation sentences as responses to stimulation is not yet the capacity to refer in the full sense. For him, reference requires full reification instead of merely perceptual reification. However, Quine ponders that while speaking about objects, reference is "central to our conceptual scheme" (Quine, 1974, p. 84). So, the major concern of Quine is to account for reference and also for the infant's acquisition of the capacity to refer. Quine says, "Relatively little mystery enshrouds the ways in which we learn to utter observation sentences, and to assent to them or dissent from them when asked. Speaking of objects, however – abstract objects, physical objects, or even sensory objects – is neither so quickly achieved nor so readily accounted for" (Quine, 1974, p. ix). Though Quine invokes the reference of objects used in observation sentences, his understanding of reference is not fixed or rigid like that of Kripke, Putnam, Mill, and Russell. Quine says that under different choices the object of reference varies. Under one choice it is a colour. Under other choices it is a patch and a different patch from occasion to occasion. Under still other choices it is a body (Quine, 1974, p. 82). How are we to settle the reference of the foreigner? In response to this, Quine says that it is settled "by working up a manual of English translation for a substantial portion of the foreigner's language" (Quine, 1974, p. 82). Thus, the reference of the foreigner's word is settled only by translating a good deal of the foreign linguistic apparatus. In this regard, Quine argues in favour of a translation manual, which, though it suffers from the issue of indeterminacy, is effective and radical according to Quine. The same point, Quine argues, applies to the language learner. For Quine, referring is not merely making the sound 'red'; rather, referring is being able to discriminate red, to recognise red. Reference is even more than discriminating; it is also a matter of being able to use what Quine calls the "apparatus of reference". By referential apparatus, he means pronouns, copulas, plural endings, along with distinctions between singular and general terms, and between the copula of predication and the copula of identity. He then argues that a child gradually absorbs this apparatus, correcting his usage against of the adults around him, until he is a full-fledged user of referential language that emerges by degrees. For Quine, referring requires various

linguistic capacities which the child acquires. Predication and the mastery of individuating general terms make up a large step towards fully referential language. Linguistically, Quine sees reference as a product of the relative clause and the general or categorical assertion. These constructions 'stand forth as the root of reference'. Combining them requires pronouns which must be construed referentially. It also requires *implicit use of identity*, since the two uses of the pronoun refer to the same object.

Quine says that the pronoun 'it' is a vital new link between the component observation sentences; it stands as objective reference used in predicative language. Quine gives more importance to pronouns rather than names as the linguistic mark of reference. He elsewhere sees the logical variables as inheriting this feature of pronouns and making it clearer and more precise. Objective reference is most clearly seen in the ineliminable use of pronouns or variables. Quine does not think that singular terms can do the same job as reference like variables or pronouns. He treats pronouns or variables as primary and names as parasitic. Pronouns or variables have a further advantage over names. A name may or may not succeed in naming an object, but no such vagaries afflict variables. A variable, Quine holds, proceeds serenely on its smooth course of values, taking whatever there may be. Quine then specifies variables as bound variables, as for Quine it is the bound variable that is seen as crucial. Bound variables play the referential role with even greater clarity. Thus, quantification is for Quine an "encapsulation of the referential apparatus", the variable "becomes the distilled essence of ontological discourse" (Quine, 1974, p. 100).

7. Reference and Identity:

Reference and identity are two concepts that are particularly dear to mathematicians, physicists, and logicians. Long ago, the concept of identity was introduced by Leibniz, and it has often been referred to as the *principle of the indiscernibility of identicals*. It states that everything is identical with itself. It is intuitive, obvious and non-informative. This principle seems ineffective in Frege's theory of sense and reference. Frege then introduces a different type of identity known as informative identity to solve the problem of reference. However, when we evaluate reference and identity in the light of Quine's predicational language, we have a different perception of it altogether. Quine claims that complete understanding of the world of enduring bodies requires mastery of the referential idiom. Full mastery of that idiom requires an understanding of the ways of bodies. Quine says that the first referring terms that we master are terms of bodies. They are prime reality, the *objects par excellence*. For Quine, reification requires criteria of identity, as he claims in his paper "Confessions of a Confirmed Extensionalist" that there is no entity without identity (Quine, 2001, p. 217). For bodies, identity conditions are provided by "the scheme of enduring and recurrent physical objects". Reification of properties is illegitimate

without identity criteria. Quine insists that referential language is useful and indispensable in connecting the loose ends of raw experience to produce the beginnings of a structured system of the world. Quine also insists on the connection between reification and logic, thereby arguing that the application of logic to our system of knowledge allows us to schematize the way in which it is interwoven together by inferential connections. It allows us to schematize the crucial relation between theory and evidence, where one can understand our theory as answerable to observation. Quine claims that the application of logic in our system is extremely effective if it meets logical standards of clarity and consistency. Here one has to be clear about exactly what objects that system asserts to exist, and that there should be clear-cut identity criteria for those objects.

8. Critical Observation:

So far, the paper explains and exemplifies various philosophical dimensions of Quine's interpretation and the philosophical implications of observation sentences. The paper argues that Quine, by introducing the concept of observation sentences, sets the tone of his philosophical voyage. His very ideas, such as naturalised epistemology, indeterminacy of translation, linguistic behaviourism, and conceptual relativism, are deeply rooted in his concept of observation sentences. All such concepts, in some sense or other, appear as counterpoints to many well-founded philosophical theories, such as the theory of being, the theory of ontology, logical reduction, internalisation of language, and the foundations of traditional epistemology, etc. Thus, in one sense, the philosophical legacy of Quine's observation sentence is enormous. However, there are certain limitations of Quine's observation sentence. It is criticised by saying that Quine's observation sentence cannot solve the translation problem entirely. Indeed, Quine himself at times acknowledges it, saying that indeterminacy of translation worsens as language moves from perceptual grounding into moral claims, cultural values, abstract theoretical ideas and historical narratives. An observation sentence can fix a shared reference point for "rabbit" or "fire", but it cannot resolve whether a native community's word for justice, honour or kinship maps clearly onto the translator's own concepts. Of course, a proponent of Quine may argue that perhaps this is not a failure of observation sentences; rather, it is a reflection of what they were never designed to do. Our position is that who will give the assurance that they were never designed to do. Quine's theory is incapable of addressing normative issues where there is no relevance of evidence, scientific data, and common sense. Therefore, his theory, in a certain sense, lacks a holistic foundation.

Quine, in his *Word and Object* (1960), claims that intersubjectivity is the distinctive mark of observation sentences. In this regard, Quine develops two naturalistic clarifications of the idea of observation sentences, of which the second one appears as the ramification of the first. The first clarification appears in his *Word and Object* (1960), and the second one, as a ramification of the first, appears later in his “Three Indeterminacies” (1990b) and *Pursuit of Truth* (1990a). The concept of intersubjectivity received much philosophical discussion at the 1986 Stanford Quine Conference, in which Donald Davidson argues at length the basic question of how to specify resemblances between the events of neural stimulation or facts about physical forces at or close to a person’s body that are present by our ordinary criteria. It seems that Quine was highly convinced by Davidson’s argument and rejected his first account of observation sentences, and sought to develop a new one as the ramification of the first, as cited. Having said this, the issue of neural resemblances cannot be taken up or accounted for as Quine claims in the case of observational sentences.

Of course, Quine occasionally struggles with his definition of the all-important notion of an observational sentence, especially to make them bear out his commitment to language being a ‘social art’. This point has been raised by Gary Kemp (2022). Gary Kemp, in his paper, reveals that it would be really difficult for Quine’s epistemology to satisfy the apparent demand presented by the social nature of knowledge. Gary Kemp claims that the so-called notion of evidence that Quine argues for is not usable in serious epistemology. While developing his naturalistic epistemology, Quine perhaps borrows a linguistic surrogate. As an alternative to Quine’s concept of evidence, Gary Kemp invokes ‘observational categories’ that would represent sentences like “Whenever it is snowing, it is cold”. Of course, Kemp acknowledges that Quine’s term ‘empirical content’ for a theory is given by the totality of its observational categories (Quine, 1981b, p. 28; Quine, 1992, pp. 16–18). According to Gary Kemp, “Quine uses it not as a practical recommendation, but only for making precise philosophical sense of the path from sensory evidence to theory – *From Stimulus to Science*, to name his last book” (Kemp, 2024, p. 962).

However, after *Word and Object* (1960), Quine acknowledges this difficulty and takes steps to circumvent it. In his works of the 1990s, Quine offered an evolutionary explanation of the intersubjective agreement of verdicts of observation sentences in terms of pre-established harmony. Kemp argues that the relation of evidence, and in particular of observation to theory, is significant to any

empiricist and certainly to Quine, who in his writings argues, “The stimulation of his sensory receptors is all the evidence anybody has had to go on, ultimately, in arriving at his picture of the world” (Quine, 1969, pp. 75-76). Gary Kemp argues that here Quine finds the notion of evidence and indeed that of observation, which seems to be *awkward to analyse*.

It is equally argued that Quine’s perception of the observation sentence that initially appeared in his *Word and Object* (1960) carried so many ambiguities, if not misleading ones, and some of which were addressed by Quine himself in his later philosophical writings. But consciously or unconsciously, he anticipated and left a lot of ambiguities in the initial stage of his account of observation sentences. At times he wrote: “All the objective data he has to go on are the forces that he sees impinging on the native’s surfaces and the observable behaviour, vocal and otherwise, of the native. Such data evince native ‘meanings’ only of the most objectively empirical or stimulus-linked variety” (Quine, 1960, p. 25). But subsequently, he remarked, “A visual stimulation is perhaps best identified ...with the pattern of chromatic irradiation of the eye.” We think that such remarks left ambiguities, as one might think that by this Quine meant the nerves triggered as in the Introduction, but on the contrary, one might equally think that by ‘chromatic irradiation’, he means a pattern of light-rays, ontically different from what is being irritated. At times he uses the term ‘chromatic irradiation’, and on other occasions he uses ‘stimulation’ or stimulus’ in the meaning of observation sentences, and again in the later stage, he brings the concept ‘neural intakes’ instead of ‘stimulations’.

Simplistically, we may conclude after Quine by saying that Quine’s main contention is to formulate observation sentences as the beginning of his march towards an object language that would ensure objective reference. He seeks objective reference under the realm of naturalized epistemology. Indeed, the term observation connotes empirical evidence as an integral part of epistemology. However, traditional epistemology at times works under philosophical dogmas or rigidities that Quine denies. His philosophy is completely free from any dogmas or fixed canons. While seeking the observational sentence, Quine adopts a process, and the whole process is the process of language learning. He then attempts to formulate predicative language as the developmental process

of the observational sentence. In his *Roots of Reference* he says: “My concern with the essential psychogenesis of reference would be fulfilled in fair measure with a plausible account of how one might proceed from infancy step by step to a logically regimented language, even bypassing English” (Quine, 1974, p. 92). Thus, in a sense, Quine is combating the idea that full cognitive language could not have emerged along the naturalistic lines that he favours. Instead, it may arguably be claimed that his naturalised empiricism is still an integral part of his philosophical survey of predication, sentences, or language. We think that Quine’s philosophical argumentation in favour of observation sentences and beyond essentially shaped the road map of his philosophical journey. Though he has not been regarded as a semanticist nor a pragmatist in the real sense of the term, his very idea of observation sentences and predication enabled him to retain the concept of truth as the central issue. His philosophical novelty and ingenuity are fundamentally based on the critical approach that he developed in his philosophical theories. We consider Quine as a relative conceptualist who denies any philosophical dogmas and fixations. His idea of ontological relativity is a case in point. He denies traditional epistemology and instead introduces naturalised epistemology, well guided by the natural sciences and common sense. As far as his relative conceptualism is concerned, he denies Kant and Strawson, who argued in favour of a unified conceptual scheme. His behaviourist and physicalistic account of language appears as a clear rejection of the internalisation of language as expounded by Chomsky and others. When Quine concentrates on the observation sentence as the paradigm of his philosophical development, he pre-empted the defaults of all these theories as cited. Thus, Quine’s inclination towards observation sentences and beyond is highly philosophically significant, as it opens up a new vista which is philosophically worthy.

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