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Davidson's concept of metaphor

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Abstract

Donald Davidson in his influential paper entitled "What Metaphors Mean," rejected the possibility of metaphorical meaning for any metaphorical utterance. He argues that meaning of any metaphor is the literal meaning of the same utterance. In this paper, I analyze Davidson's concept of metaphor in order to isolate the components of his concept of metaphor. In the first section, I highlight different aspects of Davidson's rejection of metaphorical meaning. His concept of metaphor and its components, are discussed in the second section. The third section is an investigation into his semantic theory of meaning in order to discover the foundation of his view of metaphor. My argument in this paper is that Davidson's view of metaphor is consistent with his semantic theory of meaning and his theory allows the possibility of metaphorical meaning as a pragmatic phenomenon. It is found that Davidson is not outrightly rejecting the idea of metaphorical meaning but he argues that metaphor cannot be explained within the limits of his semantic theory of meaning.

Keywords: Davidson, metaphor, literal meaning, metaphorical meaning, imagination, context

Introduction

Metaphor is generally appreciated for its aesthetic value and avoided in serious academic discussions and debates. It gained more philosophical importance in the 20th century. Metaphors are all-pervading in our use of language and hence it was necessary for the philosophers of language to seriously look at metaphor and deal with the problem of metaphorical meaning. Analytic philosophers like Black, Searle, and Davidson, turned towards serious study of metaphor in the second half of 20th century. Lakoff and Johnson introduced their Conceptual Metaphor theory towards the end of 20th century. At present, metaphor is a thriving area of interdisciplinary research. Almost every theory of metaphor aims to discuss the existence of metaphorical meaning and the mechanism of metaphor through which a new meaning emerges. This article focuses its attention on Davidson who systematically rejected the idea of metaphorical meaning. Davidson's article needs to be read in the wider context and history of the conceptualization of metaphor.

Philosophical reflection on metaphor began with Aristotle. We come across his theory of metaphor in *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*. Aristotle discusses different aspects of metaphor. His definition of metaphor ranges from the idea that metaphor as a rhetorical phenomenon to metaphor as a connection between entities based on analogy. His idea that metaphor is a rhetorical phenomenon, is accepted by many as the best definition of metaphor. As a result, metaphor is generally ignored in serious intellectual discourses. At the same time, metaphor is all-pervasive in our daily lives. Aristotelean theory of metaphor has long-lasting impact on every subsequent theory of metaphor. I think that all the conceptualization of metaphor after Aristotle is just an explanation or rejection of the key features discussed by Aristotle. Umberto Eco says, "... of the thousands and thousands of pages written about metaphor, few add anything of substance to the first two or three fundamental concepts stated by Aristotle" (Eco & Paci, 1983, pp217-218) ^[9]. We come across a minimal Aristotelianism in almost every theory of metaphor.

Davidson's Rejection of Metaphorical Meaning: Davidson's view of metaphor can be considered as a critique of the all-pervading Aristotelianism concerning metaphorical meaning. Some of the key features of Aristotle's theory of metaphor are: there is metaphorical meaning which is distinct from the literal meaning of the utterance, metaphor is a genuine mode of linguistic communication, and metaphor is a sign of genius.

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Davidson rejects all these key features mentioned by Aristotle. He was the first one in the history of philosophy of language to reject the idea of metaphorical meaning in a systematic way. His major argument is that metaphor has no special meaning and it belongs to the domain of use. My task in this paper is to figure out whether there is any possibility of pragmatic meaning for metaphor in Davidson. I begin this study with Davidson's rejection of semantic meaning of metaphor.

Davidson considers metaphor as a creative use of language which is not governed by any set of rules. He says, "understanding of metaphor is as much a creative endeavor as making a metaphor, and as little guided by rules." (Davidson, 1978, 31) ^[3]. If metaphor is not governed by the rules of language then any interpretation is possible. He further says, "There are no instructions for devising metaphors; there is no manual for determining what a metaphor 'means' or 'says'; there is no test for metaphor that does not call for taste" (Davidson, 1978, 31) ^[3]. He says that we have no set of rules to make a metaphor and to interpret metaphors. In this sense, the meaning of metaphor is just limited to the literal meaning of the utterance. Metaphor interpretation does not require any semantic resources beyond the resources for the interpretation of plain literal expressions. He says, "Metaphors mean what the words, in their most literal interpretation, mean, and nothing more" (Davidson, 1978, 32) ^[3]. This view is against the classical Aristotelean view that in every metaphor there is a conflict between two levels of meaning which are the literal meaning and the metaphorical meaning. Davidson is a critic of the idea of metaphorical meaning. He thinks that there is a history of misunderstanding of metaphor right from the times of Aristotle. He says, "The central mistake against which I shall be inveighing is the idea that a metaphor has, in addition to its literal sense or meaning, another sense or meaning" (Davidson, 1978, 32) ^[3]. His main target of attack is Max Black who defended the idea of metaphorical meaning in the history of analytical philosophy where he argued that metaphorical meaning arises in every metaphor due to an interaction between two conceptual domains (Black, 1954-1955) ^[2]. For Davidson, the difference between Aristotle and Black is that the idea of metaphorical meaning is relatively simple in Aristotle but it is complex in Black.

After rejecting the idea of the existence of metaphorical meaning, Davidson turns his attention to the much celebrated idea that metaphor is a vehicle of conveying ideas. This view has its roots in Aristotle. Aristotle says that metaphors "give your language impressiveness" (Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1407b 26-27). According to him, metaphor is an effective way of communicating ideas. He says:

We all naturally find it agreeable to get hold of new ideas easily: words express ideas, and therefore those words are the most agreeable that enable us to get hold of new ideas. Now strange words simply puzzle us; ordinary words convey only what we know already; it is from metaphor that we can best get hold of something fresh. (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1410b10).

According to Aristotle, the speaker effectively uses metaphors to communicate ideas to the audience. Metaphor brings some kind of strangeness to the speech and as a result it makes communication better. Davidson rejects the idea that metaphoric communication is an effective way of

communication alongside ordinary mode of communication. He says, "The concept of metaphor as primarily a vehicle for conveying ideas, even if unusual ones, seems to me as wrong as the parent idea that a metaphor has special meaning" (Davidson, 1978, 32) ^[3].

Davidson says that his view on metaphor is not the same as that of the logical positivists who rejected the idea that metaphor has a cognitive content. According to the logical positivists, metaphors are confusing, emotive and not empirically verifiable. They rejected anything that cannot be empirically verifiable, as meaningless statements. Davidson says, "My views should not be associated with this tradition. Metaphor is a legitimate device not only in literature but in science, philosophy, and the law; it is effective in praise and abuse, prayer and promotion, description and prescription" (Davidson, 1978, 33) ^[3]. According to Davidson, metaphors are used not for communicating any meaning or idea but for creating some effect in the hearer. He makes a distinction between *meaning* of words and *use* of words. He says, "I think metaphor belongs exclusively to the domain of use" (Davidson, 1978, 33) ^[3]. What happens in metaphor is an imaginative use of words in order to generate a desired effect in the audience. This effect is generated by the creative use of the literal meaning of an utterance in some specific context of use. According to Davidson, metaphor is not a semantic phenomenon but a pragmatic phenomenon. Marga Reimer argues that the distinction between *meaning* and *use* is central to Davidson's view of metaphor and our failure to make this distinction, results in widespread rejection of Davidson's account (Reimer, 2001, 143) ^[10].

According to Davidson, metaphor has no meaning but only certain effects on us. He says, "A metaphor makes us attend to some likeness, often a novel or surprising likeness, between two or more things" (Davidson, 1978, 33) ^[3]. He is not talking about the ordinary similarities that we perceive between things around us but he is directing our attention to the hidden and deeper levels of similarities between objects and ideas. His notion of the perception of similarity is different from the kind of similarity that we find in the theory of metaphor of Black. For Black, metaphors create new similarities as a result of the interaction between two thoughts (Black, 1954-1955, 286) ^[2]. We find that Davidson agrees with Aristotle in this case. Aristotle says in *Poetics* that "good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars" (Aristotle, *Poetics* 1459a, 9). Metaphor directs our attention to see something that is hidden or hitherto unnoticed. In this sense, metaphor is like a bump on the head which directs our attention to a stone on our path. The *metaphoric effect* is possible because of the original meaning of the word in a given context. He says, "Whether or not metaphor depends on new or extended meanings, it certainly depends in some way on the original meanings; an adequate account of metaphor must allow that the primary or original meanings of words remain active in their metaphorical setting" (Davidson, 1978, 34) ^[3]. The traditional theories argued that a new meaning which is the metaphorical meaning, emerges in a metaphorical setting but Davidson argues that it is the original meaning or the literal meaning that remains active in the metaphorical setting. Almost every conventional theory of metaphor, argues that we first encounter the literal meaning of the metaphorical utterance and then we search for a metaphorical meaning, if the literal meaning is defective or irrelevant. Searle's theory of metaphor is a typical example

for this idea that we begin with the literal meaning and then go to metaphorical meaning. He argues that a metaphorical utterance has two kinds of meaning: the literal meaning and the speaker's meaning. Searle says that if the literal meaning is defective then we move to the possible speaker's meaning (Searle, 1999, 77) ^[11]. Davidson rejects any such view that we waver between literal meaning and metaphorical meaning in the case of metaphor interpretation. He says, "In the metaphorical context we do not necessarily hesitate over its meaning. When we do hesitate, it is usually to decide which of a number of metaphorical interpretations we shall accept; we are seldom in doubt that what we have is a metaphor" (Davidson, 1978, 35) ^[3]. The problem with metaphorical utterance is that there can be multiple possible interpretations and that leads to uncertainty regarding the interpretation of metaphor. Davidson further says that there is no rule that links the literal meaning and metaphorical meaning of an utterance. He says, "There must be a rule which connects the two meanings, for otherwise the explanation lapses into a form of the ambiguity theory" (Davidson, 1978, 36) ^[3]. According to Searle, the relation between literal meaning and metaphorical meaning is rule-governed. For Searle, "The relation between the sentence meaning and the metaphorical utterance meaning is systematic rather than random or *ad hoc*" (Searle, 1999, 78) ^[11]. He then develops a three-staged theory of metaphor which explains the link between literal meaning and metaphorical meaning.

Davidson says that metaphor can be considered as an aesthetic phenomenon. Metaphor is a way of using language than communication of meaning. He says:

"In its context a word once taken for a metaphor remains a metaphor on the hundredth hearing, while a word may easily be appreciated in a new literal role on a first encounter. What we call the element of novelty or surprise in a metaphor is a built-in aesthetic feature we can experience again and again, like the surprise in Hayden's symphony no. 94, or a familiar deceptive cadence" (Davidson, 1978, 38) ^[3].

Many metaphorical utterances are still evocative even after hundreds of years of their creation. Metaphors of the great literary figures in the history like Shakespeare, are still active and evocative. They do not die as the time flows but they gain more evocative power. Metaphoric effect can vary depending on the change in context. The symphonies of Beethoven have effects on us each time we listen to them. Marga Reimer summarizes Davidson's rejection of metaphorical meaning by pointing out three of his arguments (Reimer, 2001, 144) ^[10]. They are: simile argument, dead metaphor argument, and paraphrase argument. Davidson argues that metaphors and similes are linguistic devices having similar functions. He says, "Metaphor and similes are merely two among endless devices that serve to alert us to aspects of the world by inviting us to make comparisons" (Davidson, 1978, 40) ^[3]. He finds parallels between the functioning of metaphor and simile, and uses that to defend his thesis that there is no special meaning attached to any metaphor. He says, "Metaphor runs on the same familiar linguistic tracks that the plainest sentences do; this we saw from considering simile. What distinguishes metaphor is not meaning but use – in this it is like assertion, hinting, lying, promising, or criticizing" (Davidson, 1978, 43) ^[3]. He says that simile is

successful without invoking the idea of any hidden meaning or cognitive content:

"...how is it that a simile gets along without a special intermediate meaning? In general, critics do not suggest that a simile says one thing and means another – they do not suppose that it means anything but what lies on the surface of the words. It may make us think deep thoughts, just as a metaphor does; how come, then, no one appeals to the "special cognitive content" of the simile" (Davidson, 1978, 45) ^[3].

Reimer summarizes Davidson's simile argument in the form of *modus ponens*:

"If similes don't have 'special cognitive contents,' then neither do metaphors. Similes don't have 'special cognitive content,' so neither do metaphors" (Reimer, 2001, 147) ^[10].

Davidson's second major argument is *dead metaphor argument*. Dead metaphors are the metaphors which do not possess anymore evocative power. "Neck of the bottle," "mouth of the river," and "foot of the mountain," are some of the common dead metaphors. He says that if metaphor has a second meaning, then it can be isolated at the death of the metaphor. He says:

"If metaphor involved a second meaning, as ambiguity does, we might expect to be able to specify the special meaning of a word in a metaphorical setting by waiting until the metaphor dies. The figurative meaning of the living metaphor should be immortalized in the literal meaning of the dead" (Davidson, 1978, 38) ^[3].

Reimer summarizes this argument in the form of *modus tollens*. "If metaphors involved *second meanings*, these would be the literal meanings acquired by metaphors upon death. They are not. So, metaphors do not have second meanings" (Reimer, 2001, 149) ^[10].

Davidson's third major argument against the idea of metaphorical meaning is *paraphrase argument*. To paraphrase a metaphor is to explain the meaning of the metaphor in other words. According to many of the classical theories of metaphor, it is not possible to paraphrase a metaphor. Max Black says that paraphrase of any metaphor fails because it does not have the same evocative power of the metaphor. It presupposes the idea that metaphor has a very special cognitive content which cannot be put in other words. Davidson asks, "How can this be right? If a metaphor has a special cognitive content, why should it be so difficult or impossible to set it out?" (Davidson, 1978, 44) ^[3]. Davidson argues that metaphor cannot be paraphrased. This impossibility of paraphrase is not because of the very special cognitive content but because there is nothing to paraphrase in a metaphor. He says, "I agree with the view that metaphors cannot be paraphrased, but I think this is not because metaphors say something too novel for literal expression but because there is nothing there to paraphrase" (Davidson, 1978, 32) ^[3].

Davidson's Concept of Metaphor

Davidson has no theory of metaphorical meaning but he has a concept of metaphor. He defines metaphor towards the end of his paper on metaphor. For Davidson, "Metaphor makes us see one thing as another by making some literal statement that inspires or prompts the insight" (Davidson, 1978, 47) ^[3]. He says that metaphoric effect is generated as a literal statement is uttered in a specific context. Hence, literal meaning and context are sufficient to generate a metaphor.

He says that what happens in a metaphor is just *seeing as* which is different from seeing that. Hence we cannot derive any propositional content from metaphor. He invokes Wittgenstein's idea of duck-rabbit. What we see here is not propositional in character. My task is to outline his concept of metaphor and isolate its components. He is not explicitly mentioning the various components of his concept of metaphor.

Metaphor has been an evolving concept right from the times of Aristotle and a certain degree of Aristotelianism can be found in almost every theory of metaphor. Davidson is a critic of the Aristotelianism of metaphor. He agrees with Aristotle only on one idea that metaphor enables us to see similarities existing between things. He rejects the conventional components of metaphor like: metaphorical meaning, cognitive content, interaction, and paraphrase ability. The major components of his concept of metaphor are: literal meaning, context, metaphoric effect, and imagination.

Literal meaning is the most important component of Davidson's concept of metaphor. He says that the meaning of a metaphor is its literal meaning. Consider this example, John is a pig.

This metaphor means that John is a pig and it does not say anything more or less. There is no meaning hidden behind this sentence. For Davidson, literal meaning of any utterance is the meaning of the sentence by virtue of its syntax and conventions of language. It reflects his semantic theory of meaning. He does not subscribe to any idea of context-independent literal meaning for any utterance. Jerrold Katz says that literal meaning of a sentence is the coded, context-invariant, non-figurative and explicit meaning of the sentence (Katz, 1977, 14) [6]. Davidson's theory of meaning is truth-conditional theory of meaning where the meaning of a sentence depends on the conditions under which the sentence is true. He does not subscribe to any idea of more than one meaning associated with any utterance. As a result, he rejects the idea of metaphorical meaning which arises from or exists along with the literal meaning.

Context is another major component of Davidson's concept of metaphor. Metaphor happens when the literal meaning of an utterance is encountered in a given context. Davidson explains it with the example of the poem "The Hippopotamus" by T.S. Eliot. In this poem, the poet juxtaposes two seemingly unrelated concepts and that generates some effect. The poet is not pointing out any similarity or bullying the reader to find some similarity between the hippopotamus and the Church. He says, "...there can be no doubt the words are being used to direct our attention to similarities between the two" (Davidson, 1978, 41) [3]. He says that the context plays a crucial role in the case of metaphor but he does not explore the depths of the concept of context. His idea of context appears to be similar to the idea of context in Aristotle where context is static. Context is not a static entity but it is an ever-evolving aspect in communication. Context undergoes change even during the course of the communication. In this sense, context is a dynamic entity.

For Davidson, there is no metaphorical meaning or cognitive content associated with any metaphor. He says that almost all the past theories of metaphor try to isolate the metaphorical meaning of metaphorical utterances. They suggest different methods to decipher the cognitive content. According to Davidson, they all basically talk about the

effect of metaphor on us. Davidson replaces the idea of metaphorical meaning with metaphoric effect. Metaphoric effect is possible without invoking the idea of metaphorical meaning. He says, "I have no quarrel with these descriptions of the effects of metaphor, only with the associated views as to how metaphor is supposed to produce them. What I deny is that metaphor does its work by having a special meaning, a specific cognitive content" (Davidson, 1978, 46) [3]. Metaphoric effect is the way in which metaphors direct our attention to some aspects of reality. He says, "No doubt metaphors often make us notice aspects of things we did not notice before; no doubt they bring surprising analogies and similarities to our attention; they do provide a kind of lens or lattice" (Davidson, 1978, 45) [3]. The metaphoric effect is not universal but it varies from context to context and individual to individual. The effect generated in one person depends on the context of encounter of that person. Human beings from different socio-cultural, and linguistic-ethnic background, encounter metaphors with unique conceptual systems. This metaphoric effect is not propositional in nature and hence it cannot be paraphrased. He says that metaphor invokes images rather than meaning. It leads to his fourth and final component of metaphor which is imagination.

The component of imagination is a unique feature of Davidson's account of metaphor. He does not explicitly mention that there is a component of imagination in his account of metaphor. His notion of image perception is found in its crude form in his example of duck-rabbit which he borrows from Wittgenstein. The image can be perceived as a duck or a rabbit. And what we notice is not propositional in character. According to Davidson, metaphor is all about perception of images that we generally take for granted. Metaphor directs our attention to the hidden images and aspects of reality. Martin Davies makes a clear distinction between image theories and proposition theories of metaphor (Davies, 1982, 74) [4]. According to image theories, metaphors invoke images and these perceptions are not propositional in character. Davidson's theory is a typical example of an image theory of metaphor. He says:

If what the metaphor makes us notice were finite in scope and propositional in nature, this would not in itself make trouble... But in fact there is no limit to what a metaphor calls to our attention, and much of what we are caused to notice is not propositional in character (Davidson, 1978, 46) [3].

According to proposition theories, metaphors communicate propositions. Searle's theory of metaphor is considered to be a paradigm case of proposition theory of metaphor. Davidson's idea of imagination related to metaphor influenced many later philosophers. Paul Ricoeur expands the idea of imagination related to metaphor. He discusses the role of imagination in metaphor in his book *The Rule of Metaphor*. His theory of metaphor is called as tension theory of metaphor (McGaughey, 1988) [8].

Possibility of Metaphorical Meaning in Davidson

Davidson's paper appears to reject the possibility of metaphorical meaning. There is no room for metaphorical meaning according to his semantic theory of meaning. I highlighted some of his key arguments for rejection of the possibility of metaphorical meaning. According to Ben Kotze, Davidson's rejection of metaphorical meaning is rooted in his key ideas such as "the principle of compositionality, radical interpretation, and the principle of

charity” (Kotze, 2001, 291) ^[7]. Kotze argues that Davidson’s view of metaphor depends on his semantic theory of meaning where there is no meaning hidden behind the sentence. Kotze says:

“...his views on metaphor being consistent with the rest of his work, I hope to show that the existence of metaphoric meaning or metaphoric truth would gravely endanger Davidson’s entire semantic project and that it is crucial to that project to keep the idea of metaphoric meaning out” (Kotze, 2001, 292) ^[7].

Davidson explicitly says that metaphor does not belong to the domain of semantics but to use. It means that he considers metaphor as a pragmatic phenomenon. This does not lead to the idea that Davidson is rejecting metaphor in language. Davidson’s argument is that metaphor interpretation requires only the semantic resources. Hence the meaning of any metaphor is the literal meaning of the utterance. Black says that metaphor works by violating the rules of semantics (Black, 1954-1955) ^[2]. Davidson rejects this thesis by saying that metaphor works semantically by violating semantics rules is impossible. For Davidson, the rules of semantics must be strictly followed. For him language has a compositional nature where the meaning of a sentence is determined by the meanings of the words. Hence words cannot change their meanings in the cases of metaphors. Kotze says:

“...if words were liable to change the influence which they have on the truth of sentences in a surprising fashion (as is said to happen in metaphor), this compositional feature of language would fall by the way-side; and language, as described by Davidson, simply would not work” (Kotze, 2001, 296) ^[7].

Frank Farrell argues that Davidson’s theory of metaphor, goes against his semantic theory of meaning. Farrell says:

“Davidson’s general strategy in semantics, then, has three principal features: taking the sentence as primary; treating a semantic theory as an empirical one about speaker’s behavior with regard to utterances; and liberating semantics from traditional philosophical projects” (Farrell, 1987, 631) ^[5].

Farrell argues that a deeper exploitation of Davidson’s semantics can defend the semantic status of metaphor. He concludes:

“Davidson’s account of metaphor, we may conclude, is unfaithful to the admirable strategy he has proposed for semantic theory. So we ought to reject that account and its conclusion that metaphor does not play a genuinely semantic role. Davidson’s deviance from his own strategy occurs, I believe, because his notion of semantic theory is still shaped by earlier philosophical projects that he has rejected” (Farrell, 1987, 642) ^[5].

A surface level reading of Davidson invokes the idea that he rejects the idea of metaphorical meaning. He says that there is no space for metaphor in his semantic theory of meaning and metaphor belongs to the domain of use. He does not explore the possibility of metaphorical meaning in the pragmatic level. He concludes that metaphor is a pragmatic phenomenon as it belongs to the domain of use. Hence, it is necessary to explore the possibility of a pragmatic theory of metaphor from a Davidsonian point of view.

Davidson is not outrightly denying the possibility of metaphorical meaning but he denies it of the sentences. He says that it is impossible to have metaphorical sentence meaning. Searle agrees with Davidson regarding the idea

that metaphor belongs to the domain of use (Searle, 1999) ^[11]. Searle also agrees with Davidson regarding the idea that there is no metaphorical sentence meaning. Searle explains metaphorical meaning as speaker’s meaning which is different from the literal meaning of the utterance. We cannot deny the fact that metaphor occurs very often in our conversations and discourses. We largely depend on metaphors to discuss abstract concepts and deeper experiences. We do not consider such utterances as meaningless statements but we generally agree or disagree with the point of metaphor. Sometimes we can have arguments about the point of metaphor. Hence, it is possible for us to derive a propositional content out of a metaphor if the context is clear. Davidson’s view of metaphor makes sense in the scenario of many poetic metaphors where the context is not available for us but it fails in the case of conversational metaphors where context is very much transparent. Davidson argues that metaphor evokes images in us and these images cannot be converted to words or sentences. He says, “How many facts or propositions are conveyed by a photograph? None, an infinity, or one great unstatable fact? Bad question. A picture is not worth a thousand words, or any other number. Words are the wrong currency to exchange for a picture” (Davidson, 1978, 47) ^[3]. He rejects the possibility of conversion between images and words. His view appears to be correct in the scenario of poetic metaphors where we encounter images as the context of the author is eclipsed. We encounter literary and poetic works in alien contexts. Still the metaphors of the great poets and writers, make sense to us. We are able to derive some meaning out of the metaphor and able to appreciate the work. What happens in metaphor interpretation is not the recovery of the intention of the speaker. Davidson says: “The central error about metaphor is most easily attacked when it takes the form of a theory of metaphorical meaning, but behind that theory, and statable independently, is the thesis that associated with a metaphor is a cognitive content that its author wishes to convey and that the interpreter must grasp if he is to get the message” (Davidson, 1978, 46) ^[3]. Even in the case of poetic metaphors, we are able to derive some meaning which indeed is not the intention of the poet or the author. Davidson’s theory affirms the possibility of metaphorical meaning in the scenario of pragmatics. We generally do not have any problem in grasping the meanings of metaphors that we encounter in our daily conversations and discourses. My key argument in this article is that Davidson’s rejection of metaphorical meaning is consistent with his semantic theory of meaning and his view opens up the possibility of metaphorical meaning in the context of use which Davidson did not explore in his paper.

Conclusion

Davidson is a critic of the long tradition of metaphor which celebrated the idea of metaphorical meaning associated with metaphoric utterances. In his paper entitled “What Metaphors Mean,” he does not outline a theory of metaphor but he responds to the huge claims made by the philosophers from Aristotle to Black. Davidson’s complete rejection of metaphorical sentence meaning led to a misreading and misinterpretation of his view of metaphor. In this article, I argue that Davidson’s theory of metaphor is consistent with his semantic theory of meaning, and he opens up the possibility of metaphorical meaning as speaker’s meaning. Davidson says that metaphor does not belong to the domain

of semantics as it belongs to the domain of use. It is possible for us to defend metaphorical meaning in the domain of pragmatics from a Davidsonian point of view. Hence metaphor can be explained as a highly context-rich use of language. Davidson remained skeptical regarding the possibility of deriving a propositional content from the image created by metaphor. I argue that we can derive propositional content even in the case of poetic metaphors if we have some familiarity with the context of the work.

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