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DAVIDSON'S PHILOSOPHY AND CHINESE PHILOSOPHY

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DAVIDSON'S PHILOSOPHY AND CHINESE PHILOSOPHY

Constructive Engagement

EDITED BY

BO MOU

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In memory of Donald Davidson (1917–2003),
who inspired and participated in the project

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To effectively fulfill the constructive-engagement purpose, this anthology project is accompanied with its conference project to provide a critical discussion and engagement platform. In this way, although the anthology project *per se* is an independent project instead of the conference proceedings, the latter is rather one indispensable stage for the sake of fulfilling the goal of this anthology and for the sake of effectively implementing the constructive-engagement strategy. During the whole process of preparing for the anthology project including its closely related conference project as one crucial stage of critical engagement platform, we have received a large amount of support, help and assistance in various ways from various parties. During the process of reviewing the submissions, I am grateful to Wan-Chuan Fang, Yiu-ming Fung and Linhe Han for their valuable review work and their precious time. I am grateful to Xianglong Zhang, my colleague in the 2002–2005 board of the International Society for Comparative Studies of Chinese and Western Philosophy (ISCWP), for his persistent support since the conference

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Bo Mou
Albany, California
December 15, 2005

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NOTE ON TRANSCRIPTION

Because of its official status in China, its relative accuracy in transcribing actual pronunciation in Chinese common speech and consequent world-wide use, we employ the *pinyin* romanization system in this volume for transliterating Chinese names or terms. However, those Chinese names or terms are left in their original romanizations (typically in the Wade-Giles system) in the following cases: (i) the titles of cited publications; (ii) the names whose romanizations have become conventional (such as 'Confucius'); and (iii) the names of the writers who have had their authored English publications under their regular non-*pinyin* romanized names (such as 'Fung Yu-lan'). The title of a cited contemporary Chinese book and essay is given in its *pinyin* transcription with its translation or paraphrase given in parentheses. The following rule of thumb has been used in dealing with the order of the surname (i.e., family name) and given name in romanized Chinese names: (i) for the name of a historical figure in Chinese history, the surname appears first, and the given name second (such as 'Zhu Xi'); and (ii) for contemporary figures, we follow their own practice in this aspect when they publish in English or other Western languages (typically, the given name appears first, and the surname second). In the *pinyin* versions of Chinese publication titles and those proper phrases that contain two or more than two Chinese characters, hyphens may be used to indicate separate characters.

Transcription Conversion Table

Wade-Giles	*Pinyin*
ai	ei
ch	zh
ch'	ch
	q
hs	x
ien	ian

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Table (*cont.*)

Wade-Giles	*Pinyin*
-ih	-i
j	r
k	g
k’	k
p	b
p’	p
szu	si
t	d
t’	t
ts, tz	z
ts’, tz’	c
tzu	zi
ung	ong
yu	you

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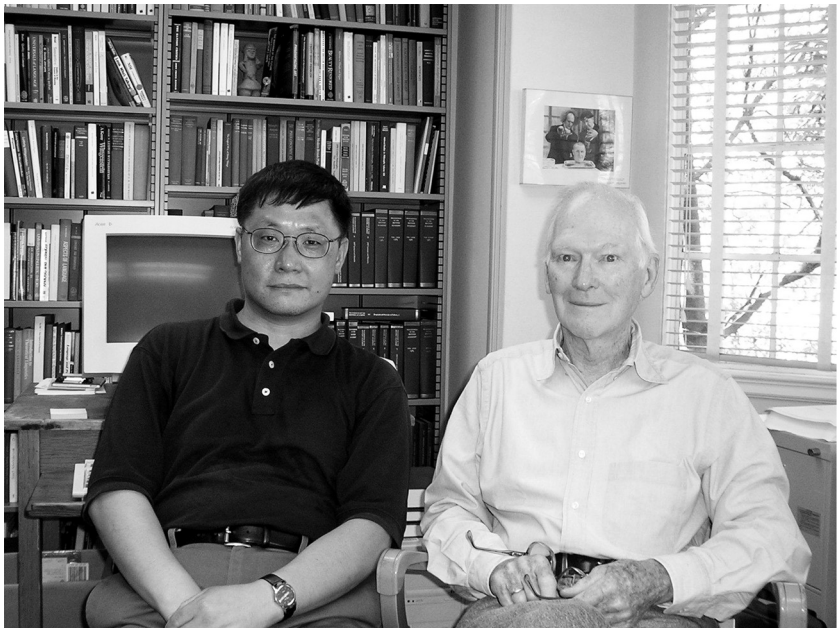

Donald Davidson and the volume editor, Bo Mou, at Davidson's UC Berkeley office discussing this anthology project on July 17, 2003, about one month before his passing away. (Photographed by Annie Ren)

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CHAPTER TEN

READING THE *ANALECTS* WITH DAVIDSON: MOOD, FORCE, AND COMMUNICATIVE PRACTICE IN EARLY CHINA[1]

Yang Xiao

The focus of this paper is on the word 'and' in the title of this volume *Davidson's Philosophy and Chinese Philosophy*. I believe scholars of Chinese philosophy should engage with contemporary philosophy of language by drawing out its implications in the context of early Chinese philosophy and language; reading the *Analects* with Davidson can shed light on both the communicative practice in the *Analects* and Davidson's philosophy of language.

Reading classical Chinese texts with Davidson should also help us to see why we should not draw conclusions about the nature of communicative practice in early China based on observations about the grammatical and semantic features of classical Chinese. I shall call this style of reasoning the 'grammatical approach' to pragmatics. Some scholars have made arguments about what the Chinese can or cannot do with the classical Chinese language, and their arguments are based solely on their observations on the grammatical and semantic

[1] An early version of this paper was presented at the conference "Davidson's Philosophy and Chinese Philosophy: Constructive Engagement" in Beijing on June 8–9, 2004. I wish to thank my fellow participants at the conference for their very helpful comments, particularly A.P. Martinich, Michael Krausz, Koji Tanaka, Stephen Angle, David Wong, Yujian Zheng, and Samuel Wheeler. My special thanks go to Bo Mou, both for his admirable work as the organizer of the conference, and for his unfailing support and patience as the editor of this volume. I also wish to thank David Keightley, P.J. Ivanhoe, A.P. Martinich, Robert Ashmore, Carine Defoort, Michael Puett, and Anna Xiao Dong Sun; I am deeply indebted to their insightful comments on earlier versions of this paper. I would like to express special thanks to my wife Anna, from whom I have learned a great deal—perhaps more than I initially wanted!—about what an astonishingly wide range of things a seemingly innocent utterance in everyday life can mean. My wife is also the connection that brought me to Davidson. In the late 1990s I moved to Berkeley to be with her, who was a student there, and audited two of Davidson's seminars. I didn't realize until later that these seminars have changed my philosophical life. I dedicate this paper to the memory of Donald Davidson.

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features of classical Chinese. Following Davidson, I suggest that we should make the 'pragmatic turn' by focusing directly on people's linguistic or communicative practice, namely the utterances of sentences in concrete occasions on which the sentences are put to work.

More specifically, I will argue against two assumptions in the grammatical approach. The first is what I shall call the *empirical assumption*, which asserts that, since classical Chinese is not an inflected language, it does not have any linguistic device to indicate grammatical moods. The second is what I shall call the *mood-force correlation thesis*, which claims that grammatical moods and pragmatic forces are closely correlated. In other words, the grammatical features, or any conventional features in general, determine how linguistic expressions can be used pragmatically. Obviously, the correlation thesis enables one to derive conclusions about *pragmatic* forces from observations about *grammatical* moods.

It is through these two assumptions that I shall engage with an important debate between Dummett and Davidson in contemporary philosophy of language. The debate is regarding the relationship between the grammatical moods of a sentence and the pragmatic forces of the utterance of the sentence. Dummett endorses the mood-force correlation thesis that there is a strict correlation between mood and force, and that illocutionary force is always conventional. Davidson rejects the thesis, and argues that neither force nor ulterior purpose of an utterance is governed by linguistic conventions.[2] Peter Strawson predicted in 1969 that the conflict between the communication-intention-based pragmatics and convention-based formal semantics has been, and would continue to be, the "Homeric struggle" at the heart of the philosophy of language.[3] This debate between Dummett and Davidson can be seen as a continuation or unfolding of this struggle.

---

[2] The Dummett-Davidson debate is anticipated by an earlier debate between Austin and Strawson concerning the issue of whether force is always conventional; please see Strawson, P.F. (1971a), "Intention and Convention in Speech Acts", in *Logico-Linguistic Papers*, London: Methuen, pp. 149–69. Dummett has tried to defend Austin against Strawson; please see Dummett, Michael (1995), "Force and Convention", in *The Philosophy of P.F. Strawson*, edited by Pranab Kumar Sen and Roop Rehha Verma, New Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research, pp. 66–93, and Strawson's reply in the same volume, pp. 403–7.

[3] Strawson, P.F. (1971b), "Meaning and Truth", in *Logico-Linguistic Papers*, London: Methuen, pp. 170–89. For an excellent brief history of contemporary philosophy of language from this perspective, please see Martinich, A.P. (1997), "Philosophy of

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TUTA SUB AEGIDE PALLAS · 1683 ·

What I want to show in this paper is that this debate has important implications for the study of Chinese philosophy and language. If Davidson is right, we would have to say that, based on observations about the grammatical and semantic features of the Chinese language, one cannot draw any conclusion about what the Chinese speakers can or cannot do with Chinese sentences; one would have to base one's arguments directly on observations about the *pragmatic* features of their communicative practice.

In Section 1, I will introduce the basic concepts of mood and force, and I will introduce the 'grammatical approach', as well as the two basic assumptions of the approach, namely the empirical assumption and the mood-force correlation assumption. In Section 2, I will first respond to the empirical assumption by arguing that classical Chinese has its own linguistic devices (such as ending particles) to indicate moods; I will then discuss the limits of this response. In Section 3, I will discuss Davidson's argument against Dummett's mood-force correlation thesis and his conventionalist theory of force. In Section 4, I will use a passage from the *Analects* to illustrate Davidson's point that there is no convention of sincerity, which is at the heart of his argument against Dummett's conventionalist theory. Section 5 concludes the paper by briefly exploring the implications of what Davidson calls the principle of the 'autonomy of linguistic meaning'.

1.

In the English language we indicate grammatical mood by inflecting the form of the verb. For example, the verb phrase 'to be immediately put into practice' has at least four inflections, which signify indicative, interrogative, imperative, and subjunctive moods:

Language", in *Routledge History of Philosophy, Volume X Philosophy of Meaning, Knowledge and Value in the Twentieth Century*, edited by John Canfield, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 11–38. Martinich convincingly shows that such a conflict between the two approaches to language starts with the debate between Russell and Strawson. As he puts it, "Behind Strawson's objection [to Russell's theory of description] is a view of language that is radically different from Russell. For Russell, words and sentences are the fountains of meaning. For Strawson, people using words and sentences are. For Russell, semantics is the primary object of linguistic study. For Strawson, it is pragmatics, how people use words" (p. 18).

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(1) . . . is being immediately put into practice . . .
(2) . . . is [it] immediately being put into practice?
(3) . . . should be immediately put into practice . . .
(4) . . . were to be (could have been) immediately put into practice . . .

These inflected phrases are known as *mood-indicators*. When they appear in complete sentences, they indicate four *grammatical moods* of a sentence:

(1a) Indicative sentence:
What has just been learned is being immediately put into practice.
(2a) Interrogative sentence:
Is what has just been learned being immediately put into practice?
(3a) Imperative sentence:
What has just been learned should be immediately put into practice.
(4a) Subjunctive (counterfactual) sentence:
What has just been learned were to be (could have been) immediately put into practice.

As we can see, the mood of a sentence is a syntactic feature of the sentence, independent of any actual uses of the sentence. The mood of a sentence remains the same even when the sentence is being used to do different things in different situations; this is because the mood is a formal feature of the syntactic structure of a sentence.

Now when a sentence is uttered by a speaker in a specific situation, the speaker is using it to do certain things. We need another term to refer to what the speaker is doing with the sentence; the term is the 'illocutionary force' of the utterance, or simply the 'force' of the utterance. For example, when the utterance of a sentence is being used to issue an order, we say that the force of the utterance is to issue an order.

When one utters the above four sentences, (1a)–(4a), one can do at least four different things:

(1b) making an assertion
(2b) asking a question or making a request
(3b) offering advice (issuing an instruction, an order, or a command)
(4b) expressing a wish (or regret)

The way I presented these examples might have given the impression that there is a strict correlation between the grammatical *moods* of a sentence (the interrogative, indicative, imperative, or subjunctive), and the *forces* of the utterances of the sentence (asking a question, describing a fact, offering a piece of advice, or expressing a wish).

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It is indeed true that, when we ask a question, we often use an interrogative sentence; when we describe a fact, we often use an indicative sentence, and so on. Nevertheless, is it really the case that the interrogative sentences are *always* used to ask questions, just as imperative sentences are always used to issue an order? In other words, is there a strict correlation between mood and force?

In "Moods and Performances", which was first presented at a conference in 1976, Davidson tries to answer these questions. He thinks that the questions can be formulated a little differently, because the relationship between mood and force can also be seen as about the relationships of two ways of classifying utterance:

> The moods classify sentences, while uses classify utterances; but the moods indirectly classify utterances, since whatever distinguishes sentences can be used to distinguish utterances of them. So we may ask, what is the relation between these two ways of classifying utterances; how are assertions related to utterances of indicative sentences, for example, or commands to utterances of imperative sentences?[4]

What Davidson argues against is the mood-force correlation thesis, which claims that "the associated classes of utterances are identical: utterances of imperatives are commands, utterances of interrogatives are question-askings, etc".[5] If Davidson is right that there is no strict correlation between mood and force, then we should not try to determine what people can or cannot do with English sentences by looking at the grammatical features of the language; the fact that English is an inflected language with a variety of linguistic devices to indicate grammatical moods becomes unimportant and irrelevant.

Let us now turn to some examples in Chinese. In order to illustrate what I call the grammatical approach, let us take a look at a classical Chinese sentence from 11.22 of the *Analects*:[6]

(C) *Wen si xing zhi* 聞斯行之.

---

[4] Davidson, Donald (1984a), "Mood and Performance", in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 109–10.

[5] Davidson, 1984a, p. 110.

[6] All quotations from the *Analects* are to book and passage numbers in Yang, Bojun (1980), *Lun-Yu-Yi-Zhu* [The *Analects* with Translations and Comments], Beijing: Zhonghua shuju. All translations in this paper are my own, but I have been aided greatly by the existing English translations by Simon Leys and D.C. Lau.

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The first character '*wen*' means *to hear*; the second character '*si*' means *this*; the third character '*xing*' means *to practice* or *to be put into practice*; the last character '*zhi*' means *it*—referring, in this case, what has just been heard. One may translate the sentence as something like this: 'Having heard it, then immediately put it into practice.' Or, 'What has just been learned should be immediately put into practice.' But there is a problem here: This is just one of many possible translations.

Part of the problem comes from the fact that neither classical nor modern Chinese is an inflected language. If one believes that inflection is the only way to indicate the mood of a sentence, then there is no way to determine the mood of this sentence. Hence we can have at least four English translations for the original Chinese sentence:[7]

(1a) What has just been learned is being immediately put into practice.
(2a) Is what has just been learned being immediately put into practice?
(3a) What has just been learned should be immediately put into practice.
(4a) What has just been learned were to be (could have been) immediately put into practice.

That is to say, the Chinese sentence '*wen si xing zhi*' in itself allows it to be translated into any of these English sentences, each with a different grammatical mood. How do we make sense of these grammatical differences between the Chinese and English languages? One may argue that, because there are no mood-indicators in classical Chinese, people must have been confused about illocutionary forces in ancient China. Or one may conclude that certain speech-acts (such as expressing a wish) cannot be done, due to the absence of

[7] There would be more possible translations if we take into account time and number. The English language indicates time and number by inflection at every occurrence of a verb or noun. As A.C. Graham has pointed out, even though Chinese verbs and nouns have no inflection, this does not mean that the classical Chinese language does not have its own devices to indicate them. In fact, Chinese indicates time and number by particles only when time and number is relevant. As Graham argues, "we need to be told whether an event is past, present, or future no more often than is indicated by the temporal particles of Chinese. The idea that there are confusions in early Chinese thought due to the absence of tense and singular or plural seems to me quite untenable. At some places one has trouble rendering into English without committing oneself to tense or number, but this is merely a translator's problem" (Graham, A.C. [1978], *Later Mohist Logic, Ethics and Science*, Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, pp. 28–9). What I argue here is that what Graham says about time and number also applies to mood in classical Chinese.

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the corresponding mood-indicators (such as the subjunctive mood indicator) in classical Chinese.

Two scholars are representative of this kind of reasoning. Alfred Bloom has argued that, since the Chinese language does not have a linguistic device for conterfactuality, the Chinese do not have counterfactual thinking. Moreover, since argumentation needs counterfactuals, the Chinese are incapable of argumentation.[8] Following this line of thinking, one can make a similar argument that the Chinese cannot express wishes, because expressing wishes also needs counterfactuals.

Chad Hansen is a much more influential scholar; he has famously claimed that the ancient Chinese do not have concepts of sentence, belief, or truth, and that they never use sentences to describe facts or to express truths or beliefs; their words are only used to guide people's behaviors. His arguments are based on observations about the syntactical differences between Chinese and English sentences. In his observations, he focuses on certain grammatical features of classical Chinese, which, in comparison to English, are obviously distinctive and unique. Here is a summary of some of these features:

> (1) The absence of sentence function marking in classical Chinese:
>
> The absence of sentence function marking, . . . and the use of predicate-only sentences contribute to viewing all words as having only a naming function and to the failure to distinguish the sentence as a functional composite linguistic form.[9]
>
> (2) The lack of grammatical inflections in classical Chinese:
>
> Chinese does not have grammatical inflections, which in Western languages, draw attention to the sentence as a compositional unit. . . . Chinese theories of language did not concentrate on sentences because, simply, classical Chinese sentencehood is not syntactically important.[10]

Another manifestation of the lack of grammatical inflections in classical Chinese, according to Hansen, is that "Classical Chinese does not have explicit descriptive and prescriptive forms," which can be

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[8] Bloom, Alfred H. (1981), *The Linguistic Shaping of Thought: A Study in the Impact of Language on Thinking in China and the West*, Hillsdale, New Jersey: L. Erlbaum.

[9] Hansen, Chad (1985), "Chinese Language, Chinese Philosophy, and 'Truth'", *Journal of Asian Studies* 44 (3), p. 516.

[10] Hansen, 1985, p. 500.

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easily expressed by the inflections of the verbs in English.[11] Based on these observations, Hansen concludes that the linguistic practices and theories in China and English-speaking countries are radically different:

> These observations about the differences between Chinese and English syntax explain (from a Chinese point of view) why we place so much emphasis on the sentence, or (from our point of view) why Chinese philosophers do not.[12]
>
> Classical Chinese does not have explicit descriptive and prescriptive forms. Students of comparative translation, therefore, will find huge chunks of text that one translator renders in declarative English and another in imperative English. Behind this apparent ambiguity, I suggest, lies this assumption about the function of language. *All* language functions to guide behavior.[13]

One of the most striking characteristics of these arguments by Bloom and Hansen is that they never look directly at the linguistic and communicative practice; instead they focus on the grammatical features of Chinese sentences, and end up with a conclusion about the nature of Chinese linguistic practice.[14] Let us now return to our earlier example from 11.22 of the *Analects*, (C) '*wen si xing zhi*', to illustrate this point.

As we have shown, the Chinese verb '*xing*' in (C) has no inflection, whereas the English verb phrase 'to be put into practice' has at least four inflections, which correspond to four grammatical moods. That is to say, for this one Chinese sentence (C), there can be at least four English translations: (1a), (2a), (3a), and (4a). Let me reiterate (1a) and (3a) as follows:

> (1a) What has just been learned is being immediately put into practice.
> (3a) What has just been learned should be immediately put into practice.

Note that (1a) is a descriptive, indicative English sentence, and (3a) is a prescriptive, imperative English sentence. Like Hansen, one may feel compelled to conclude that the English-speaking people can dis-

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[11] Hansen, Chad (1992), *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 51.

[12] Hansen, 1985, p. 500.

[13] Hansen, 1992, p. 51; the emphasis is Hansen's.

[14] When Hansen says, "My hypothesis is that *real differences* in the languages can explain differences in the popular theories of language" (Hansen, 1992, p. 25; emphasis added), he means the *grammatical* differences.

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tinguish between two functions of language: stating facts and guiding behavior, whereas the Chinese see language as having only one function, .i.e., to guide behavior.[15]

In general, if one does take a grammatical approach, one might be tempted to argue that, since Chinese is not an inflected language, and since Chinese verbs do not have the grammatical moods such as indicative, interrogative, imperative, and counterfactual moods, the Chinese are either incapable of doing things such as making an assertion, asking a question, issuing an instruction, or expressing a wish, or they are incapable of telling them apart.

Two assumptions in these arguments are problematic. The first is what I have called the *empirical assumption*, which is that the classical Chinese language does not have any linguistic device to indicate the grammatical moods. The second is what we have called the *mood-force correlation thesis*, which claims that grammatical moods and pragmatic forces are closely correlated; in other words, the grammatical features of linguistic expression determine how they can be used pragmatically. The correlation thesis enables one to derive conclusions about pragmatic forces from observations about grammatical moods. In the rest of the paper, I shall deal with these two assumptions in turn.

2.

It is relatively easy to respond to the empirical assumption. Bloom and Hansen seem to presuppose that inflection is the *only* way for a language to have mood-indicators. However, empirical evidence shows that classical Chinese has different grammatical devices to indicate moods, one of which is through 'ending particles'. These are words at the end of sentences that have no substantive meaning in

[15] This argument has its logical problems. For example, one cannot derive homogeneity from ambiguity, i.e., from the fact that Chinese expressions can have ambiguous or multiple interpretations, one cannot draw the conclusion that there is only one interpretation. More concretely, if '*wen si xing zhi*' can be read either as descriptive or prescriptive utterances, one cannot conclude that this means it is always prescriptive, i.e., to always guide behavior. If one sticks to the grammatical approach, then, in order to claim that *all* the uses and functions of sentences in a language *L* are to guide behavior, one would have to show that *all* sentences in *L* are unambiguously prescriptive ones.

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themselves, and their only function is to indicate the moods of the sentences.

Although the transcribers and editors of the *Analects* do not know the technical term of 'ending particles' or 'particles', they do have a systematic way of using a variety of ending words to indicate the moods of sentences. One example is the particle '*hu* 乎'. It has no substantive meaning when it appears at the end of a sentence, but it has an important grammatical function, which is to indicate that the sentence is an interrogative one. For example, '*junzi shang yong* 君子尚勇 (A gentleman prizes courage)' is an indicative sentence, but if we add '*hu* 乎' at the end of it, we get '*junzi shang yong hu* 君子尚勇乎 (Does a gentleman prize courage?)', which is an interrogative sentence, used by Zilu to ask a question in 17.23. Another example is '*Guan Zhong zhi li* 管仲知禮 (Guan Zhong knows the rituals)', which is indicative, whereas 'Guan *Zhong zhi li hu* 管仲知禮乎 (Does Guan Zhong know the rituals?)' is interrogative, and is used to ask a question in 3.22.

Another interrogative ending particle is '*zhu* 諸'. Sentences with the ending particle '*zhu*' are also often used to ask questions:

> 13.15. Duke Ding asked: "One single maxim that can lead a country to prosperity, is there such a thing (*you zhu* 有諸)?" Confucius replied: [. . .].
>
> Duke Ding said: "One single maxim that can ruin a country, is there such a thing (*you zhu* 有諸)?" Confucius replied: [. . .].

As we can see, we can ask whether something exists when the particle '*zhu*' is paired with the verb '*you* 有 (there is)' to form the following sentence:

> *(Q)* *You zhu* 有諸?
>
> Is there such a thing?

To answer the question, one can give a positive reply by saying:

> (A) *You zhi* 有之.
>
> There is such a thing.

We can find such a pattern in another passage:

> 7.35. The Master was gravely ill. Zilu asked permission to offer a prayer. The Master said: "Is there such a practice (*you zhu* 有諸)?" Zilu said: "Yes, there is (*you zhi* 有之), and the prayer goes like this: 'We

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pray to you, spirits from above and spirits from below.'" The Master said: "In that case, I have been praying for a long time already."

Now we have responded to the empirical assumption on its own ground by showing that there exist other linguistic devices to indicate grammatical moods in classical Chinese. However, this grammatical response is not satisfactory in many ways. I shall mention just two problems here. The first is that certain types of mood-indicators are absent in the *Analects*; for example, although we can find interrogative and indicative particles in the *Analects*, we cannot find any *imperative* particles. Now let us again take the sentence '*wen si xing zhi* 聞斯行之' as an example. Earlier in the paper, we mentioned that there are four possible English translations, two of which are imperative and indicative sentences. However, there is no grammatical or semantic feature in the original sentence that gives us any information about whether it is indicative or imperative, because in the pre-*Qin* and *Han* periods there was no ending particle indicating the imperative mood. It is only in much later periods (the *Tang* and *Song* dynasties) that new ending particles such as '*zhuo* 著' and '*hao* 好' were invented to indicate the imperative mood.[16] Had we found '*wen si xing zhi zhuo* 聞斯行之著' in the *Analects*, we would have been able to say that this is an imperative sentence.

The second problem is that, with regard to the particles we do find in the *Analects*, even though they can indicate grammatical *moods* of the sentences, they do not always tell us what the pragmatic *force*s of the utterances are. In other words, there is no correlation between mood and force in classical Chinese. For example, if we look at all the sentences that end with the interrogative particle '*hu* 乎' in the *Analects*, we would find out that these sentences are not always being used to ask questions or make requests. Confucius's very first utterance in the first passage of the *Analects* has the ending particle '*hu*'. One translator correctly renders it as follows: "The Master said: 'To learn something and then to put it into practice at the right time: is this not a joy?'"[17] Although it is a grammatically interrogative sentence,

[16] For a variety of examples of such imperative particles, see Luo, Ji (2003), *Bei-Song-Yu-Qi-Ci-Ji-Qi-Yuan-Liu* [The Mood-Indicators in the Northern Song Dynasty and Their History], Chengdu: Bashu shushe, pp. 140–76 and pp. 230–8. The use of '*zhuo*' as an imperative particle can still be found in many regional dialects today in China (pp. 144–52).

[17] I am using Simon Leys' translation here. The translation reflects faithfully the

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it is obviously a rhetoric question, which can be readily expressed by an indicative sentence: "It is a joy to learn something and then put it into practice at the right time." Let us take the interrogative mood-indicator '*zhu*' as another example. The particle '*zhu*' appears 14 times at the end of a sentence in the *Analects*. It turns out that they are not always being used to ask questions or make requests: Sometimes the sentence is used to ask a question (see 6.6, 7.35, 9.13, 13.1, and 13.15); sometimes it is just a rhetorical question, which is equivalent to an assertion (6.30, 12.11, and 14.42).

How do we make sense of these cases? Should we conclude that classical Chinese is uniquely different from all the other languages because the mood-force correlation thesis does not apply to it? I believe this is where Davidson comes in. These examples from the *Analects* sharply highlight the issue that is at the heart of the Dummett-Davidson debate, in which Davidson argues against Dummett's mood-force correlation thesis. For Davidson, communication is possible only because there is no correlation between the grammatical features of a language and what people can do with it. Hence, if Davidson is right, there is nothing unique about the lack of such a correlation in classical Chinese.

3.

One of Davidson's early arguments against the mood-force correlation thesis is based on the existence of counterexamples. After having cited a passage from Dummett, in which Dummett gives his version of the correlation thesis,[18] Davidson comments:

> [W]hat bothers me is the implied claim that assertion and the indicative mood can be this closely identified. For there are many utterances of indicative sentences that are not assertions, for example indicative sentences uttered in play, pretense, joke, and fiction; and of course assertions may be made by uttering sentences in other moods. (Utterances

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grammatical mood of the original Chinese sentence. But in order to emphasize that the force of the utterance is actually a rhetorical question, a better translation might be: "To learn something and then to put it into practice at the right time: *isn't* this a joy?"

[18] See Dummett, Michael (1973), *Frege: Philosophy of Language*, London: Duchworth, pp. 315, 316.

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> of 'Did you notice that Joan is wearing her purple hat again?' or 'Notice that Joan is wearing her purple hat again' may on occasion simply be assertions that Joan is wearing her purple hat again.) And similarly for other moods; we can ask a question with an imperative or indicative ('Tell me who won the third race', 'I'd like to know your telephone number'), or issue a command with an indicative ('In this house we remove our shoes before entering').[19]

There is a passage from the *Analects* that is similar to Davidson's last example (I use Simon Leys's translation here):

> 13.18 The Governor of She declared to Confucius: "Among my people, there is a man of unbending integrity: When his father stole a sheep, he denounced him." Confucius said: "Among my people, men of integrity do things differently: a father covers up for his son, a son covers up for his father—and there is integrity in what they do."

This is another counterexample to the mood-force correlation thesis, because the *indicative* sentences here are used to issue a *normative* instruction, just as in Davidson's example, 'In this house we remove our shoes before entering'.

Davidson is aware that it is not enough to refute Dummett's mood-force correlation thesis simply by giving a list of counter-examples; he has to respond to Dummett's conventionalist version of the thesis, which is supposedly capable of dismissing these counterexamples. I now turn to Davidson's arguments against Dummett's conventionalist theory of force.

In "Mood and Performance", Davidson mentions that Dummett can explain away the counterexamples by saying that they are all deviant, abnormal or non-serious cases. Dummett claims that it is "normal", "natural" or "serious" that indicative sentences are always used to make assertions, imperative sentences are always used to issue commands, and interrogative sentences are always used to ask questions. Davidson argues that Dummett's solution doesn't work:

> It is easy to see that an appeal to what is 'serious' or 'normal' does not go beyond an appeal to intuition. It is no clue to the seriousness of a command that it is uttered in the imperative rather than the indicative; similarly, a serious question may be posed in the imperative rather than the interrogative mood. And if 'normal' means usual, or statistically more frequent, it is dubious indeed that most indicatives

[19] Davidson, 1984a, p. 110.

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> are uttered as assertions. There are too many stories, rote repetitions, illustrations, suppositions, parodies, charades, chants, and conspicuously unmeant compliments. And in any case the analysis of mood cannot plausibly rest on the results of this sort of statistical survey.[20]

According to Davidson, a way for Dummett to rescue his thesis is to drop the concepts of normal or serious cases, and switch to a conventionalist version of the thesis. Instead of saying that an assertion is an indicative sentence uttered in the normal case, Dummett could say that an assertion is an indicative sentence uttered under conditions specified by convention.

Dummett has a specific proposal about the convention for assertions, which is that "assertion consists in the (deliberate) utterance of a sentence which, by its form and context, is recognized as being used according to a certain general convention."[21] But for Davidson, this is just the definition of assertion, not the convention of assertion:

> This [proposal of Dummett's] also seems to me to be wrong, though in a somewhat different way. What is understood is that the speaker, if he has asserted something, has represented himself as believing it—as uttering a sentence he believes true, then. But this is not a convention, it is merely part of the analysis of what assertion is. To assert is, among other things, to represent oneself as believing what one asserts.[22]

Therefore, for Davidson, the real issue is: Can there be a convention that can always tell us whether a speaker believes in what she utters? To this question, Davidson's answer is no. His argument goes like this. Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that we do have an assertion-indicator such as Frege's assertion sign. That is to say, we have a sign that is not just the formal equivalent of the indicative mood, but also a conventional sign of the force of assertion. Suppose that we always use this strengthened mood whenever we make an assertion. Davidson then argues,

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[20] Davidson, 1984a, p. 111.

[21] Dummett, 1973, p. 311.

[22] Davidson, Donald (1984b), "Communication and Convention", in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 270. For Dummett's rebuttal, please see Dummett, Michael (1993), "Mood, Force, and Convention", in *The Seas of Language*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 203–23. But I cannot deal with Dummett's rebuttal here.

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> It is easy to see that merely speaking sentence in the strengthened mood cannot be counted on to result in an assertion; every joker, storyteller, and actor will immediately take advantage of the strengthened mood to simulate assertion. There is no point, then, in the strengthened mood; the available indicative does as well as language can do in the service of assertion. But since the indicative is not so strong that its mere employment constitutes assertion, what must be added to produce assertion cannot be merely a matter of linguistic convention.[23]

In another essay, "Communication and Convention", Davidson formulates the argument as follows:

> It is clear that there cannot be a conventional sign that shows that one is saying what one believes; for every liar would use it. Convention cannot connect what may always be secret—the intention to say what is true—with what must be public—making an assertion. There is no convention of sincerity. If literal meaning is conventional, then the difference in the grammatical moods—declarative, imperative, interrogative, opative—is conventional. These differences are in the open and intended to be recognized; syntax alone usually does the job. What this shows is that grammatical mood and illocutionary force, no matter how closely related, cannot be related simply by convention.[24]

Note that Davidson's conclusion that there cannot be conventional indicators for assertion applies to all languages or linguistic practices. It is not a unique feature of the Chinese language that it does not have assertion-indicators or force-indicators, because no language does.

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[23] Davidson, 1984a, p. 113.

[24] Davidson, 1984b, p. 270. Here we should be very careful not to take Davidson as saying that the illocutionary force is a purely private, interior, and mental act. Elsewhere he does make it clear that this is not what he means: "The argument [for the autonomy of linguistic meaning] has a simple form: mood is not a conventional sign of assertion or command because nothing is, or could be, a conventional sign of assertion or command. The reason for this, it should be stressed, is not that the illocutionary force of a speech act is a *purely* mental, interior, or intentional aspect of the act" (1984a, p. 114; emphasis added). Nevertheless, Davidson's point certainly has to do with the fact that speech act has a mental, interior, or intentional aspect. Right after the passage cited above, Davidson adds, "Of course assertion or command must be intentional, as must meaning in the narrow sense. But it is part of the intention that the act should be interpreted as assertive or commanding, and therefore part of the intention that something publicly apparent should invite the appropriate interpretation" (p. 114).

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4.

Davidson's point that there is no linguistic convention of sincerity (or insincerity) can be illustrated through a very interesting example from the *Analects*:

> 17.4 The Master went to Wucheng [where Ziyou was the governor],[25] where he heard the sound of string instruments and hymns. He was amused and said with a smile (*wan er er xiao* 莞爾而笑): "Why use an ox-cleaver to kill a chicken?" Ziyou replied: "Master, in the past I have heard you say: 'Gentlemen who cultivate the Way love people; ordinary people who cultivate the Way are easy to govern.'" The Master said: "My friends! What Ziyou said is true. My earlier remark was a joke."

Let me list Confucius's two utterances, as well as the statement he makes in the past, as follows:

(1) Why use an ox-cleaver to kill a chicken?
(2) Gentlemen who cultivate the Way love people; ordinary people who cultivate the Way are easy to govern.
(3) My friends! What Ziyou said is true. My earlier remark was a joke.

There can be a variety of interpretations of the forces of Confucius's utterances. Let us start with (1). Many readers would agree with Ziyou's taking (1) as an assertion, and understand (1) as saying that Ziyou should not have bothered to cultivate ordinary people with music and rituals. This is analogous to killing a chicken with an ox-cleaver; Confucius wants to say that Ziyou only needs to cultivate the gentlemen. But this is inconsistent with Confucius's own teaching, which Ziyou cites in his response to the Master.

Can there be any conventions to determine that (1) must be an assertion? As we can see in the passage, the editors of the *Analects* actually report that Confucius says it 'with a smile (*wan er er xiao*)'. Does this indicate that it is not an assertion, but an ironic remark? Can we then say that it is a 'convention of insincerity' that a speaker is making an ironic remark rather than an assertion when the speaker utters the sentence with a smile? It is indeed the case that people do sometimes tell a joke with a smile, and yet they can also make an assertion with a smile, and tell a joke with a straight face. One

[25] In 6.14, it is mentioned that Ziyou is the governor of Wucheng. I use Simon Leys's translation here.

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may claim that the convention of insincerity should include more factors in order to be a real convention; for example, it is possible that Ziyou does not detect the force of (1) because he doesn't pay attention to the *tone* of Confucius's utterance.

Davidson does not deny that these factors (such as tone and gesture) play key roles in the making and detecting of assertions, but he argues that they can't conclusively determine whether the speaker is sincere:

> It must also be conceded that interpreters and speakers of a language are generally able to tell when an assertion has been made, and that this ability is an essential part of their linguistic competence. Furthermore, knowledge of linguistic and other conventions plays a key role in the making and detecting of assertions. Costume, stance, tone, office, role, and gesture have, or may have, conventional aspects, and all these elements can make a crucial contribution to the force of an utterance. We may easily allow all this without agreeing that merely by following a convention, indicative or imperative utterances become assertions or commands.[26]

Therefore, our conclusion has to be that there is no convention telling us that Confucius's utterance (1) must be an assertion or that it must be a joke. That is to say, we cannot say that Ziyou must have got it wrong in his reaction to (1) when he takes it as an assertion, and is puzzled by the fact that it is not consistent with (2). In fact, it is an entirely plausible scenario that Ziyou has got the force of (1) right. That is to say, Confucius originally does make an assertion when he utters (1). It is only after Ziyou points out that (1) is not consistent with (2), which is Confucius's own belief in the importance of using rituals and music to cultivate ordinary people, that Confucius gives a retrospective articulation of the force of the remark, claiming that (1) is actually intended as an ironic remark and should have not been taken seriously in the first place. Since a joke cannot be inconsistent with an assertion, Confucius can thus explain away the seemingly contradiction between (1) and (2).

Now let us turn to the interpretations of Confucius's utterance (3), which is a remark about the force of (1). There are two possible readings of the force of (3). The first is to assume that it is an assertion. The second is to assume that it is still an ironic remark.

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[26] Davidson, 1984a, pp. 112–3.

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If we take (3) 'My earlier remark was a joke' as an assertion, we would have to agree that Confucius's earlier remark, (1), was indeed a joke. How do we make sense of this? Li Zhi 李贄 (1521–1602), a *Ming* dynasty scholar, has suggested that Confucius is extremely pleased about what he has seen in Wucheng, where Ziyou is the governor, and that is why he intentionally makes a '*fan yu* 反語' (ironic remark).[27] In other words, Li Zhi here is alluding to an interesting phenomenon, which is that when people are extremely pleased they often feel that they have to use irony to express it. But Ziyou fails to understand Confucius's intention, and, as Li Zhi puts it, "gets very serious about it." Confucius then has to get serious as well, making an assertion regarding the force of (1) to clarify his intention.[28]

Can we determine conclusively that (3) must be an assertion? As Dummett would suggest, we can get clues from the manner in which (3) is uttered, or from certain linguistic conventions such as the grammatical indicators. The editors report that the Master speaks with a smile when he utters (1), but they do not say anything about the manner in which the Master utters (3). It's simply 'The Master said'. However, as we have argued earlier, this kind of description does not necessarily mean that Confucius is making an assertion.

Now let us look at the grammatical indicators, in this case, the ending particles. In the original Chinese version of (3), we find two sentences with ending particles: there is the particle '*ye* 也' at the end of the sentence 'What Ziyou said is true', and there is the particle ('*er* 耳') at the end of the sentence 'My earlier remark was a joke'. Traditional Chinese scholars agree that '*ye*' and '*er*' are two typical indicative particles (*jue-ci* 決辭).[29] But this does not mean that these two utterances in (3) must be assertions. As Davidson has argued, we cannot say that the indicative sentences are always used

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[27] Li, Zhi (1975), *Si-Shu-Ping* (Comments on the Four Books), Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, p. 146.

[28] Li, 1975, p. 146.

[29] For example, we find the following observation from the preface to a *Yuan* Dynasty monograph on particles: "'*hu* 乎', '*yu* 歟', '*ye* 耶', '*zai* 哉', '*fu* 夫', these are inquisitive particles (*yi-ci* 疑辭); '*yi* 矣', '*er* 耳', '*yan* 焉', '*ye* 也', these are assertive particles (*jue-ci* 決辭)" (Lu, Yiwei [1988], *Zhu-Yu-Ci-Ji-Zhu* [Collected Comments on the *Particles*], edited and commented by Wang Kezhong, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, p. 183). Scholars believe that Lu Yiwei was the first to write a book-length study of the particles. We do not know much about the author except that the book was written no later than 1324.

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to make assertions in 'normal' and 'serious' situations. Davidson's point becomes especially obvious in our case: There is absolutely no use to appeal to the notion of the 'serious' situations, because whether this very situation is a serious one is exactly what we are trying to determine here.[30]

Would the appeal to convention help? Dummett suggests that an assertion is an indicative sentence uttered under conditions specified by linguistic conventions. Our case here shows that Davidson is right to claim that Dummett's suggestion won't work. If there is any convention that can help us decide whether (3) is an assertion or a joke, it would have to be the non-linguistic ones, such as the conventional image of Confucius as always being deadly serious, or the conventional wisdom that the *Analects* is a collection of Confucius's sincere moral instructions and commands. Christopher Harbsmeier has shown convincingly that, in the *Analects*, we can often find Confucius teasing his students, playing with words, and amusing people by saying things jokingly. Contrary to the conventional image, Confucius is actually "an impulsive, emotional, and informal man, a man with wit and humor, a man capable of subtle irony with an acute sensibility for subtle nuances".[31] In his comments on 17.4, Harbsmeier suggests that Confucius is probably still joking when he makes his last remark: "My earlier remark was a joke." In other words, Confucius might have been joking all the way through.[32]

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[30] I have argued elsewhere that traditional Chinese scholars also believe that the syntactic features of a sentence do not determine the pragmatic uses of the sentence. Here is one example. In his 1687 commentary on Lu Yiwei's book on particles, the *Qing* Dynasty scholar Chen Lei says, "[The ending particle] '*zai*' indicates interjection, or interrogation, or interruption, or assertion, or just the completion of the utterance. We should always look at the total context of the speech and text; we cannot just focus on the word '*zai*'" (Lu, 1988, p. 17). Other Qing scholars who have written on particles, such as Yuan Renlin, Wang Yinzhi, and Liu Qi, have made similar observations. It can be argued that Chinese scholars do not necessarily see these particles as just *grammatical mood* indicators. In fact, when the Chinese scholars write about particles, they discuss not only their syntactic functions, but also (and even more often) their functions and uses in composition, style, persuasion, rhetoric, and argumentation.

[31] Harbsmeier, Christoph (1990), "*Confucius Ridens*: Humor in the *Analects*", *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 50, 1990, p. 131. I am grateful to David Keightley for having urged me to read this article.

[32] One way to make sense of this possibility is to think about Harold Pinter's plays. Besides the *Analects*, Pinter's plays can be read as another massive set of examples of how conventionally simple utterances, such as 'I don't know', 'You are right', 'Yes', 'Well', or non-utterances (pause, silence) are able to do a wide range of things

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Relying on Davidson's arguments, we can see how it is *possible* to make different judgments about whether certain utterances in the *Analects* are assertions or jokes.[33] Obviously, whether an utterance is a joke or an assertion has great implications when we interpret a text. I believe what Bernard Williams has to say about how to interpret Plato's *Theaetetus* applies to the *Analects* as well: "If we are going to get the most from reading one of Plato's dialogues, we have to keep in close touch with its tone, sustaining a sense of what is a joke, what is merely provisional, what is being tired out or tried on."[34]

5.

Let me summarize my arguments in this paper. If we take a pragmatic perspective, we will realize that it is not enough to know the grammatical mood of the sentences, for the mood is the feature of a sentence that remains the same, regardless of the different situations in which it is uttered, whereas the force is the feature of the utterance that varies from situation to situation. To put the point in a nutshell, there is no strict correlation between grammatical mood-indicators of a sentence and the forces of the utterances of the sentence, because the speaker can always intend to use the sentence to do things that are not determined by its grammatical or conventional features. That is to say, we must take into account the "total speech situation" in which the speaker makes the utterance.[35]

In other words, the grammatical or conventional features of linguistic expressions do not determine how they can be used pragmatically, and this applies to all languages. Davidson takes this general

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in our daily, domestic life. The force of a sentence in a script, as every good director or actor knows, is not determined by the literal meanings of the sentence or any other linguistic conventions, and hence can always be interpreted (and delivered) differently. Directors and actors thus can always have a new interpretation of a play in a new production.

[33] Elsewhere I have shown that generations of commentators in China have made different judgments regarding the forces of the utterances in the *Analects*; please see Xiao, Yang (2006), "The Pragmatic Turn: Articulating Communicative Practice in Early China", *Oriens Extremus*.

[34] Williams, Bernard (1999), *Plato*, New York: Routledge, p. viii.

[35] The term "total speech situation" is from Austin, J.L. (1975), *How to Do Things with Words*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Second Edition, p. 52 and p. 148. He emphasizes that "[i]t is important to take the speech-situation as a whole" (p. 138).

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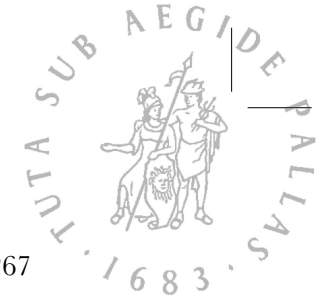

point as a basic trait of human language and calls it the *autonomy of linguistic meaning*:

> What this argument illustrates is a basic trait of language, what may be called the autonomy of linguistic meaning. Once a feature of language has been given conventional expression, it can be used to serve many extra-linguistic ends; symbolic representation necessarily breaks any close tie with extra-linguistic purpose. Applied to the present case, this means that there cannot be a form of speech which, solely by dint of its conventional meaning, can be used only for a given purpose, such as making an assertion or asking a question.[36]

In another place, Davidson states the thesis of the autonomy of linguistic meaning as follows: "Once a sentence is understood, an utterance of it may be used to serve almost any extra-linguistic purpose. An instrument that could be put to only one use would lack autonomy of meaning; this amounts to saying it should not be counted as a language."[37]

People were quite shocked when they first heard Davidson declaring at the end of his 1986 essay "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs" that "there is no such thing as a language". This sentence, taken out of its context, does sound shocking. But let us cite the whole passage here:

> I conclude that there is no such thing as a language, not if a language is anything like what many philosophers and linguists have supposed. There is therefore no such thing to be learned, mastered, or born with. We must give up the idea of a clearly defined shared structure which language-users acquire and then apply to cases. And we should try again to say how convention in any important sense is involved in language; or as I think, we should give up the attempt to illuminate how we communicate by appeal to conventions.[38]

There is nothing one should feel shocked about if one is familiar with Davidson's thesis of the autonomy of meaning, first defended in his 1976 essay "Mood and Performance". One should see clearly

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[36] Davidson, 1984a, pp. 113–4. Please also see 1984b, p. 274.

[37] Davidson, Donald (1984c), "Thought and Talk", in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 164.

[38] Davidson, Donald. (1986), "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs", in *Philosophical Grounds of Rationality: Intentions, Categories, Ends*, edited by Richard Grandy and Richard Warner, Oxford: Clarendon, p. 174. This paper, with comments by Ian Hacking and Michael Dummett, is also included in *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, edited by Ernest LePore, Oxford: Blackwell, 1986.

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that Davidson is simply saying that we should not focus on words and sentences, or the conventions and rules that are supposed to govern them; instead, we should look at people's communicative practice, and how they actually do things with words and sentences. And no convention can capture our communicative practice. Since classical Chinese can be easily perceived as lacking a "clearly defined shared structure which language-users acquire and then apply to cases", reading the *Analects* together with Davidson should make—and I hope, has made—it much easier for us to see that "we should give up the attempt to illuminate how we communicate by appeal to conventions."