

form. The particular idealisation of  $L_1$  that in this case would result in  $Q('a')$  being a translation, in Carnap's sense, of  $P(a)$  might well be agreed to by some or even most users of the informal language in question.

Where the assumption that object-language concepts are well defined becomes much less plausible is when the vaguer sentences of everyday language or traditional philosophy are to be translated into the formal mode. Here Carnap acknowledges that the object language is (usually) not one to which his definition of 'translation' even applies.<sup>5</sup> It is hardly surprising, then, that the 'translations' he nonetheless offers entangle him in flagrant contradictions. One of his arguments for the superiority of the formal mode to the material mode, for instance, turns on the impossibility of deriving certain undesirable or unwanted consequences from the formal-mode translations that *are* derivable from their corresponding material-mode sentences.<sup>6</sup> But if the material-mode sentence and its formal-mode 'translation' have different consequences, then by Carnap's own definition their 'content' differs, and the purported translation is *not* a translation in the sense he has himself defined.

This (and the many analogous problems with other 'translations' offered in Part V) might have been possible to get around by introducing something like a scale of 'degrees of translation', so that a formal-mode sentence might be an 'approximate translation' of a material-mode one, but Carnap attempts nothing of the sort. He admits that in many cases, an author has not made his intentions sufficiently clear, and one can only guess approximately at the meaning; 'one can at best conjecture that one has captured what the author meant more or less accurately, i.e. that one has given a translation that deviates less or more from one that the author himself would give from  $L_1$  into  $L_2$ ' (§64, p. 183; PT p. 240). But he gives no hint of a metric or a criterion for deciding how 'far' a translation may diverge from its corresponding material-mode sentence without ceasing to be a translation.

Some of the translations Carnap offers are downright absurd. The most notorious is perhaps the material-mode sentence 'Yesterday's lecture was

<sup>5</sup> On the same page as the above definition, he says that 'the examples below . . . belong almost exclusively to ordinary language; they are thus not formulated with sufficient precision to permit the application of exact concepts' (§74, p. 213; PT p. 287). And later, when he offers translations of philosophical statements: 'As the original sentences are mostly ambiguous, a translation into the formal mode of speech cannot be specified unambiguously [*eindeutig*]. In fact it cannot even be claimed with certainty that the sentence involved is a pseudo-object sentence and thus in the material mode of speech. The present translations are therefore no more than informal suggestions.' The burden of supplying a more exact translation, he adds, is on those who would defend the philosophical theses mentioned (§79, p. 229; PT p. 302).

<sup>6</sup> Examples 12, 13, and 14 in §75, p. 217; PT pp. 290–1.

about Babylon', to be translated into the formal mode, Carnap suggests in all apparent seriousness, by 'The word "Babylon" occurred in yesterday's lecture.' Carnap might have reasoned that the ordinary-language word 'about' is extremely vague, and leaves a great deal of scope for interpretation, but even a moment's thought should have convinced him that no amount of stretching would make 'the text T is about X' always equivalent to 'the name of X occurs in T'.

The root of the problem is that pseudo-object sentences are actually intended, at bottom, as the later *explicanda*. They are the *unclear* concepts that require clarification, possibly followed by replacement, i.e. explication. So the definition Carnap offers in §74 of *Syntax* is hopelessly inadequate to the task, as it assumes that the concepts to be clarified are *already* clear. This is plainly at cross purposes with the stated intentions of the book, and especially of Part V, where translation from the material into the formal mode is offered as the principal tool for dissolving the philosophical confusions resulting from the expression of meta-theoretical discussions in the material mode of speech (§§78 and 80).

The technical implementation of Carnap's stated programme fails, then. This is partly to be blamed, no doubt, on the tensions introduced into the published *Syntax* by the abrupt change in its fundamental doctrine after much of it (including the more discursive 'philosophical' Part V) had already been written; this will be discussed below. But the main obstacle to a satisfactory account of explication was Carnap's continued attachment to the Wittgensteinian ideal of requiring philosophical or meta-scientific sentences to be *internal* (in his later terms) to the system into which they were to be reconstructed or explicated. Specifically, the language *in* which the translation is done (stated) is also the language ( $L_2$ ) *into* which the translation is to be made (from  $L_1$ ). In January 1931 he had switched, it is true, from judging meta-discourse by one cognitive standard to judging it by the other – from the standard for *Realwissenschaft* (empirical significance) to that for *Formalwissenschaft* (logical significance). But the standard was (again) still internal. Wittgensteinian scruples about the impossibility of stepping outside the language still prevented him from considering a meta-language for statement and discussion of the translation that was distinct from the target language for rational reconstruction (or explication). Carnap was still making the same mistake as he had made in the *Metalogik*, in other words, except that instead of trying to confine everything within a *single* language, he was trying to confine it within *two*. Despite his new pluralism, he seemed to indicate that we should choose *one particular* scientific object language, and *one particular* meta-language to be the target

language for *all* explications; the idea of a canonical ‘model language’ has not yet been quite buried. Though the language was no longer fixed, and the meta-language was not fixed even relatively to a chosen object language, Carnap still clung to the notion that once a language was chosen, all significant discourse – including meta-discourse – must be confined to the framework thereby established. The principle of tolerance had not yet sunk in far enough to dissolve this residue.

Meanwhile, this residual Fregean-Wittgensteinian universalism prevented him from appreciating that translation from the material mode (by hypothesis vague and often misleading) to the (precise) formal mode must take place *outside* the language of either the material-mode object concept or the syntactic meta-language of that concept’s formal-mode translation. It must be done, that is, in a meta-meta-language *distinct* from the meta-language, a meta-meta-language that has sufficient flexibility to refer to vague material mode expressions. And it must be preceded by a propaedeutic process of clarification, in which agreement is reached – pre-systematically, so to speak – on a better-defined subconcept of the ill-defined notion to be ‘translated’ or replaced. Translation from the material into the formal mode should have been recognised as inherently *external*, in other words, as it was by hypothesis not determinate within the (clearly stated) set of formation and transformation rules of the target language. But Carnap was not ready, in 1934, to acknowledge that *any* external discourse could be significant. This had to await the availability, within the meta-perspective, of a species of discourse (to be called ‘pragmatics’ by the late 1930s) in which practical considerations bearing on the choice of explications (or entire language systems) could be framed. When explication finally was advanced as the successor to rational reconstruction, in the mid-1940s, as we will see in the next chapter, Carnap acknowledged its external status.

Despite the gap between the *Syntax* programme and its technical implementation, and despite the lingering prejudice that only sentences internal to a chosen language framework could have meaning, the *spirit* of the later ideal of explication pervades the *Syntax* and associated publications. Though the mechanics are still somewhat muddled, the previous (rational reconstruction) programme of *replacement* (of pre-scientific concepts by precise ones) has now become a more open one. Despite his official adherence to an internal procedure of rational reconstruction, Carnap in fact acknowledges even in the *Syntax* that many translations are not claims but proposals, and emphasises the importance of specifying the language into which a translation is offered. Otherwise, he says, it is unclear whether a

claim or a proposal is intended, and if the latter, it is not clear *what* proposal is being offered (§78, p. 226; PT p. 299).<sup>7</sup>

The transformation of philosophical doctrines into proposals regarding the form of language rests on the principle of tolerance. If there were a ‘correct’ language, then there could be no proposals, but only claims. Carnap’s technical approach to translation from the material into the formal mode of speech, on the other hand, stems from the original syntax idea of January 1931, which was still a response to the Wittgensteinian problems of meaning that had preoccupied the Circle before that. So while the spirit of the new enterprise, epitomised in the principle of tolerance, was now in much better harmony with Carnap’s voluntarist convictions, it was still yoked to an apparatus that had no hope of doing it justice.

#### TENSIONS WITHIN THE PUBLISHED *logical syntax*

The quasi-Wittgensteinian view Carnap held before January 1931 could be called a ‘meaning foundationalism’ – the meanings of all sentences rest on the representation of atomic facts by atomic sentences. The sleepless night in January 1931 brought the replacement of this meaning foundationalism by an axiomatic approach to language as a whole, in which all workings of the language are exhaustively specified by explicit rules stated in a meta-language. In its original statement, this ‘syntax’ view completely excluded the possibility of ‘meaning’ – even in its informal sense of representational correspondence between configurations of linguistic objects and configurations of objects in the world. There seemed no way of capturing any such correspondence in explicit formation or transformation rules for a language. Only a year after the *Syntax* book was published, though, Tarski’s definition of truth suggested to Carnap that such correspondences could, after all, be captured in meta-linguistic rules. This amounted to defining a new notion of meaning ‘from above’, in contrast to the one built up ‘from below’ that Carnap rejected in January 1931. The rules specifying the language could now also specify an ‘interpretation’ rigorously, rather than regarding the rules as descriptive and determined by a more fundamental notion of meaning built up from atomic components.

In January 1931, then, the rejection of meaning foundationalism and its replacement by an axiomatic approach was all of a piece. But seen retrospectively from Carnap’s later standpoint, this original syntax view could be

<sup>7</sup> See also ASP 1932b and 1933a, as well as ‘On the Character of Philosophical Problems’ (1934d, pp. 122–4).