

**Indeterminacy of Translation**  
**Edmundo Alejandro Ortiz Alvarez, 2023.**

My project had as its main aim the analysis of Willard Van Orman Quine's Indeterminacy of Translation thesis, the claim that no one sentence can ever be translated from one language to another. In the original plan for this project, I divided my engagement with this thesis into five rough steps: First, I would try to understand Quine's general philosophical commitments, focusing on how these might influence an accurate interpretation of the thesis. Afterwards, I would engage with the thesis itself in the various ways it has been expressed in Quine's writings and translate it, as it were, into its most manageable and clear expression. Having done that, I would outline the consequences the thesis would have if it were true. After that, I would contest the thesis, both by denying one or more of its premises and by trying to show that the consequences of it being true were either obviously false or at least too unpalatable to accept without some hesitation. Finally, I would try to offer an alternative criterion for translation, one that allowed for translation ambiguities. The two ambiguities I would focus on would be a) what I call 'culturally heavy' words (e.g., "freedom" in the United States), and b) expressions of language the meanings of which relied on the phonetics of such language (e.g., poems).

The project followed the outline described. When I got to the third week and found myself still trying to understand Quine's general premises, nevertheless, I understood that I would have to modify the project's timeline and scope. From there, it became a case of wrestling both, in a theoretical level, with Quine, and, on a practical level, with time. The decision to shift my focus from Quine's general philosophy to studying and writing about the indeterminacy thesis itself, for example, was a decision mostly based not on the belief that my interpretation of the thesis would no longer benefit from further reading about Quine's general philosophical commitments; instead, I made the shift because I was aware that, if I didn't, I wouldn't have the time to engage with the indeterminacy thesis after which my project was titled. Similar was the shift from reading about the indeterminacy thesis to writing about it. I didn't start writing because I understood the indeterminacy thesis in its entirety; it wasn't even because the added value of each reading reduced enough as to not make it worth my time. (In some ways, the contrary happened: the more I read, the more complex the underlying foundations of the claim became and the more I understood that more reading *would* be beneficial.) The decision to shift to writing came from the fact that I had to; if I didn't begin writing, I would be unable to work on the essay that, from the beginning, represented my project's main aim. Thus, the project was as much an exploration of Quine as it was learning how to engage with a project of this sort.

My summer was, overall, a humbling success. I was unable to tackle all of what I had (perhaps too liberally) planned to. Be that as it may, I was able to make many of the blunders characteristic of taking on projects of this size for the first time; mistakes I learnt from just as much as I learnt about Quine. I now have the theoretical background, the written skeleton and the required experience to keep working on my research; it has become an independent project. My project made me to grow academically and allowed me to gain an appreciation for the role translation plays in communication and meaning.

**Mentor: Professor Scott Sehon**

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