The Language Revolution
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Class #9
Donnellan
With a review of Strawson, contrasting his presuppositionalism with Frege's sense descriptivism and Russell's analytic abbreviational descriptivism

Logical Form
and Grammatical Form

- Frege presented us with three puzzles about language and its connection to the world.
  - ‣ A distinction between sense and reference to solve them.

- Russell encouraged us to examine deep logical form.
  - ‣ Logical form is ontologically significant.
  - ‣ The way the world really is.

- Cleavage between grammatical form and logical form
  - ‣ John came down the road
  - ‣ Nothing came down the road.
  - ‣ Also: sakes and behalves

Strawson on Grammar and Logic

- Strawson criticizes Russell's abandonment of grammatical form.
- Frege (with his notion of a logically perfect language) and Russell (with his attempts to recast sentences in logical form) tried to solve philosophical puzzles by reforming language.
- Strawson: "Ordinary language has no logic" (344).
- Ordinary language philosophers tried to solve the same puzzles by looking to how we actually use words.
  - A use theory of meaning
  - Wittgenstein's later work
  - Ordinary language philosophy

Conventions and Context

- Strawson: Frege and Russell neglect the conventions and context of the use of a sentence when analyzing it.
  - ▸ "Conventions for referring have been neglected or misinterpreted by logicians. The reasons for this neglect are not hard to see, though they are hard to state briefly. Two of them are, roughly: (1) the preoccupation of most logicians with definitions; (2) the preoccupation of some logicians with formal systems" (337).
  - ▸ The logicians' emphasis on definition blinds them to contexts and conventions.

- To refer, one needs to provide a context for that reference.
  - ▸ time
  - ▸ place
  - ▸ situation
  - ▸ identity of speaker
  - ▸ subjects of immediate focus of interest
  - ▸ histories of speaker and listener

- Conventions for referring are more complicated than those for ascribing and asserting.

Reference and Assertion

- There are two distinct functions of language
  - ‣ to refer: parts of sentences.
  - ‣ to assert: whole sentences.
- The uniquely referring use of an expression picks out an individual or object or particular event or some other one thing in the course of saying something about that thing.
  - ‣ Pronouns, proper names, and phrases beginning with 'the' all have uniquely referring uses.
  - ‣ Often these words are used to refer to general terms, or abstract classes.
  - ‣ Sometimes they are predicates, not subjects.

Presuppositionalism

- Our assertions sometimes make false presuppositions about the expressions which are part of them.

- If we keep in mind that the different tasks of referring and asserting are separate, we will avoid the puzzles that motivated Frege.

- In particular, we must keep in mind that a sentence is a type, but meaning applies only to uses of a sentence type.

- Sentences are true or false only on particular uses.
  - "We cannot talk *of the sentence* being true or false, but only of its being used to make a true or false assertion, or (if this is preferred) to express a true or false proposition. And equally obviously we cannot talk of *the sentence* being *about* a particular person, for the same sentence may be used at different times to talk about quite different particular persons, but only of a *use* of the sentence to talk about a particular person" (326).

Failure of Presupposition

KW: The present king of France is wise.
NKW: The present king of France is not wise.

- Meinong supposed that all referring expressions must refer to existent objects.
  - ‣ There must be a present king of France, in some sense.
  - ‣ Russell and Strawson agree that Meinong is crazy.
- Frege argued that 'the king of France' has a sense despite its lack of reference.
  - ‣ So, while KW is meaningful, it lacks a truth value which would be its reference.
- Avoiding senses, Russell claims that the forms of KW and NKW are not subject-predicate.
  - ‣ They are existential assertions containing three parts.
    - – R1. There is a king of France;
    - – R2. There is not more than one king of France; and
    - – R3. There is nothing which is the king of France and which (is/is not) wise.

Strawson on Failure of Presupposition

Russell was misled by the circumstances in which one might utter KW and NKW.

KW: The present king of France is wise.
NKW: The present king of France is not wise.

▸ In order to assert KW and NKW truly, it would be necessary that there be a present king of France.

▸ But the sentence does not mean that there is a present king of France.

▸ Russell is right that 'the king of France is wise' and 'the king of France is not wise' are significant.

  – If someone used one of them to make a true assertion, then there would have to be a wise king of France presently.

▸ Russell is wrong that anyone now uttering either of them would make a true or false assertion and that part of such an assertion would be that there is no a unique king of France.

Implying and Asserting

KW: The present king of France is wise.
NKW: The present king of France is not wise.

- Someone using either sentence implies that there is a king of France.
  - ‣ Different from asserting

- When we say that there is no king of France, we aren't contradicting KW or NKW.
  - ‣ Not saying those sentences are false
  - ‣ Merely pointing out that a truth value is not possible.

- Russell thus confused referring and meaning.

- Even for logically proper names, Strawson argues, their meanings are not their referents.
  - ‣ If someone asks the meaning of 'this', I don't hand him the object (or worse, the sense datum).
  - ‣ Reference is achieved in use depending on the name, context, conventions, etc., not because the name is shorthand for some other expression which refers unerringly, unambiguously, and logically properly.
  - ‣ "There are no logically proper names and there are no descriptions (in [Russell's] sense)" (324).

Strawson on Meaning

- The meaning of a name or other singular term is neither its referent nor its referent under a particular mode of presentation (a description).

- Meanings of singular terms are instructions for determining whether particular uses of it refer.

- Similarly, meanings of sentences are not the propositions they express.
  - "To give the meaning of an expression (in the sense in which I am using the word) is to give *general directions* for its use to refer to or mention particular objects or persons; to give the meaning of a sentence is to give *general directions* for its use in making true or false assertions "(327).

- Meanings are conventions, or sets of instructions, governing the use of expressions or sentences in particular assertions.

Bivalence

KW: The present king of France is wise.
NKW: The present king of France is not wise.

- Strawson thinks that KW and NKW are neither true nor false.
  - ▸ Frege, too

- But Strawson doesn't defend the distinction between sense and reference.

- Strawson argues that uses of KW and NKW fail to say anything either true or false because of the failure of presupposition.
  - ▸ Nothing has been said.
  - ▸ The utterance is neither true nor false.
  - ▸ "Now suppose some one were in fact to say to you with a perfectly serious air: "The king of France is wise". Would you say, "That's untrue"? I think it's quite certain that you wouldn't. But suppose he went on to *ask* you whether you thought that what he had just said was true, or was false; whether you agreed or disagreed with what he had just said. I think you would be inclined, with some hesitation, to say that you didn't do either; that the question of whether his statement was true or false simply *didn't arise*, because there was no such person as the king of France" (330).

- A declarative sentence may be uttered while no assertion is made.

Bearers of Truth

- Three options: Frege's, Russell's, and Strawson's.

- Frege ascribed truth or falsity to propositions (meanings of sentences).
  - ‣ Lost bivalence for propositions
  - ‣ One could save bivalence by claiming that sentences like KW fail to express propositions.
  - ‣ But, such sentences seem to be fully meaningful.

- Russell ascribes truth or falsity to sentences in their true logical form.

- Strawson noticed that the bearer of truth value need not be the primary bearer of meaning.
  - ‣ "So the question of whether a sentence of expression *is significant or not* has nothing whatever to do with the question of whether the sentence, *uttered on a particular occasion*, is, on that occasion, being used to make a true-or-false assertion or not, or of whether the expression is, on that occasion, being used to refer to, or mention, anything at all" (327-8).

- Strawson argues that meaning is a function of a sentence or expression.

- Referring and the bearing of truth values are a function of a particular use.
  - ‣ "The question whether the sentence is significant or not is the question whether there exist such language habits, conventions, or rules that the sentence logically could be used to talk about something... "(329).

- Strawson thus ascribes truth or falsity to the utterance or assertion.
  - ‣ Failure of bivalence for sentences.
    - – Strawson might argue for bivalence at the utterance level.
    - – Or he could abandon the desire for bivalence as a logician's bugaboo.

Presupposition and Frege's Other Puzzles

The Problem of Cognitive Content

- Strawson believes that distinguishing meaningfulness and assertion solves the problem.
  - ‣ 'a = a' is ordinarily used to make a trivial assertion.
  - ‣ 'a = b' is ordinarily used to make a contentful assertion.
- Only the logicians, who confuse a referential term with a non-logical object think there is a problem of cognitive content.
  - ‣ "Because Russell confused meaning with mentioning, he thought that if there were any expressions having a uniquely referring use, which were what they seemed (i.e. logical subjects) and not something else in disguise, their meaning must *be* the particular object which they were used to refer to. Hence the troublesome mythology of the logically proper name. But if some one asks me the meaning of the expression "this" - once Russell's favourite candidate for this status -I do not hand him the object I have just used the expression to refer to, adding at the same time that the meaning of the word changes every time it is used. Nor do I hand him all the objects it ever has been, or might be, used to refer to. I explain and illustrate the conventions governing the use of the expression. This is giving the meaning of the expression. It is quite different from giving (in any sense of giving) the object to which it refers; for the expression itself does not refer to anything; though it can be used, on different occasions, to refer to innumerable things" (328).

Opaque Contexts

- Strawson does not write directly about the sticky problem of opaque contexts.

- We can easily infer that he believes that Lois Lane can believe that Superman can fly without believing that Clark Kent can fly because 'Clark Kent' and 'Superman' carry different rules of application.

- But Strawson's claim that sentences which include empty names can not be used to make a true or false statement is clearly false in some opaque contexts:
  - Some children believe that Santa Claus brings children presents.
  - Children who believe the proposition expressed by the that-clause actually believe something false.

- A potentially-interesting paper topic

Donnellan on Reference

Reference

- How language hooks onto the world

- Language has content.
  - ‣ Aboutness
  - ‣ The subjects of our assertions

- Some subjects are general.
  - ‣ 'Whales are mammals.'
  - ‣ Generalizations (induction, abstractions) from particular expressions.
    - – This whale is a mammal and that whale is a mammal, etc.

- Particular subjects
  - ‣ Demonstratives
  - ‣ Pronouns
  - ‣ Names
  - ‣ Definite descriptions ('the F')

- Call terms for particular subjects singular terms

What is the Semantic Value of a Singular Term?

- Naive View: the object itself
  - ‣ Augustine, Mill, Russell for logically proper names

- Objections to the Naive View
  - ‣ Swift: it's too naive
    - – But mockery (eye rolling, gaping stare) is not an argument.
  - ‣ Locke: communication would be impossible
    - – But the veil of ideas is worse.
  - ‣ Frege
    - – Cognitive Content
    - – Empty Reference
    - – Opaque Contexts

- Frege's solution: senses
  - ‣ The sense of a name (or definite description) is its mode of presentation
    - – Sense descriptivism
    - – Ontological profligacy!

- Russell's solution
  - – Abbreviational descriptivism

Donnellan and the Attributive/Referential Distinction

- Strawson and Russell fail to disambiguate an attributive and a referential use of a description.
  - ‣ "A speaker who uses a definite description attributively in an assertion states something about whoever or whatever is the so-and-so. A speaker who uses a definite description referentially in an assertion, on the other hand, uses the description to enable his audience to pick out whom or what he is talking about and states something about that person or thing" (285).

- I can mean (at least) two different things by uttering BG.
  - ‣ BG: The person who got the best grade in Logic is smart.

- Attributive case
  - ‣ I am making a statement about any person who could get the best grade in logic, that that person must be smart to do so well.
    - – We can call my intention *de dicto*.
    - – In the attributive, *de dicto* sense, a speaker says something about whomever fits a given description.

- Referential, *de re*, sense
  - ‣ If Kimberly got the best grade in Logic (or, I think that she did, or I think that you think that she did) and I want to indicate that Kimberly is smart, I can use the description of Kimberly as the person who got the best grade to pick her out, and say of her that she is smart.
  - ‣ In the referential use, someone picks out an individual and then states something about her.

How the A/R Distinction Affects Truth Values

- Consider SM in a case in which there is no murder, but a suicide.
  - ‣ SM: Smith's murderer is insane.
- The truth-value of SM may differ depending on whether we interpret the definite description attributively or referentially.
- Strawson argued that uttered sentences containing empty singular terms fail to make assertions.
- On the attributive use, nothing is said
  - ‣ There is no person to fit that description.
  - ‣ Strawson's OK.
- But on the referential use, we can make a successful assertion even if there is no murderer.
  - ‣ We were just picking out a person by using that description.
- Strawson thus accounts for only some uses of definite descriptions.

Properties and Propositions

BG The person who got the best grade in Logic is smart.

- In the attributive case, the property of getting the best grade in Logic is part of the proposition expressed by BG.
  - ‣ It is essential in that case that the reference apply only to the person who got the best grade in the class.

- In the referential case, the property of getting the best grade in the class has no part in the proposition.
  - ‣ Maybe someone other than Kimberly actually got the best grade.
  - ‣ I may be wrong about her getting the best grade, but I can still make an assertion about her being smart.

Donnellan Out-Wittgensteins Strawson

- "Strawson and Russell seem to me to make a common assumption here about the question of how definite descriptions function: that we can ask how a definite description functions in some sentence independently of a particular occasion upon which it is used. This assumption is not really rejected in Strawson's arguments against Russell. Although he can sum up his position by saying, "'Mentioning' or 'referring' is not something an expression does; it is something that someone can use an expression to do," he means by this to deny the radical view that a "genuine" referring expression has a referent, functions to refer, independent of the context of some use of the expression. The denial of this view, however, does not entail that definite descriptions cannot be identified as referring expressions in a sentence unless the sentence is being used. Just as we can speak of a function of a tool that is not at the moment performing its function, Strawson's view, I believe, allows us to speak of the referential function of a definite description in a sentence even when it is not being used. This, I hope to show, is a mistake" (282-3).

Donnellan Out-Presuppositionalizes Strawson Too

- "In many cases a person who uses a definite description can be said (in some sense) to presuppose or imply that something fits the description. If I state that the king is on his throne, I presuppose or imply that there is a king. (At any rate, this would be a natural thing to say for anyone who doubted that there is a king.) Both Russell and Strawson assume that where the presupposition or implication is false, the truth value of what the speaker says is affected. For Russell the statement made is false; for Strawson it has no truth value. Now if there are two uses of definite descriptions, it may be that the truth value is affected differently in each case by the falsity of the presupposition or implication" (283).

Reasons for Presuppositions

- The two uses differ in the reasons for presupposing that someone fits a used definite description.

- In the referential use, we want the hearer to pick out a particular person, so we don't want to mis-describe him or her.
  - ‣ If reference is successful, it does not matter if we mis-describe our referent.
  - ‣ We may well have said something true of a person, without having referred appropriately.
  - ‣ We agree with what was said, but not how it was said.

- In the attributive use, the description is primary; we do not want to refer to anyone unless someone fits the description.
  - ‣ If no one fits the description, then nothing will have been said.

Against Strawson's Truth-Value Gaps

- Strawson's automatic invocation of a truth-value gap for utterances which contain non-referring singular terms is thus too categorical.

- "I am thus drawn to the conclusion that when a speaker uses a definite description referentially he may have stated something true or false even if nothing fits the description, and that there is not a clear sense in which he has made a statement which is neither true nor false "(302).

Russell's Error

- According to Russell's theory of descriptions, we must analyze BG in the attributive way, since the use of a definite description entails that there is one and only one thing that fits that description.

- If we use a description that does not fit our intended subject, we have to re-cast our sentence.

- For Russell, only sentences with logically proper names as their subjects can be used referentially, and only then because we are sure that reference will be successful.

- Such sentences refer to the thing itself, not under a certain description.

- Definite descriptions can function more like proper names, directly picking out a specific individual, than Russell thought they were.

- "Now this seems to give a sense in which we are concerned with the thing itself and not just the thing under a certain description, when we report the linguistic act of a speaker using a definite description referentially. That is, such a definite description comes closer to performing the function of Russell's proper names than certainly he supposed" (303).

Russell's Analysis

- The man in the corner drinking the martini is the provost.
  - ‣ $(\exists x)\{Mx \bullet Cx \bullet Dx \bullet (\forall y)[(My \bullet Cy \bullet Dy) \supset y=x] \bullet Px\}$
- Donnellan claims that the sentence does not entail Russell's version.
- There may be no person who satisfies the first three predicates and still the sentence can be true.
- The relationship, then, between the original sentence and Russell's version is weaker than entailment.
  - ‣ "Russell's theory does not show - what is true of the referential use - that the implication that something is the Φ comes from the more specific implication that what is being referred to is the Φ. Hence, as a theory of definite descriptions, Russell's view seems to apply, if at all, to the attributive use only. Russell's definition of denoting (a definite description denotes an entity if that entity fits the description uniquely) is clearly applicable to either use of definite descriptions. Thus whether or not a definite description is used referentially or attributively, it may have a denotation. Hence, denoting and referring, as I have explicated the latter notion, are distinct and Russell's view recognizes only the former" (293).

Strawson's Error

- Strawson sees that definite descriptions have two uses.

- But he thinks that the use that a definite description has is determined by the sentence in which it is placed.

- The same sentence can be used in either way.
  - ▸ "The murderer of Smith" may be used either way in the sentence "The murderer of Smith is insane." It does not appear plausible to account for this, either, as an ambiguity in the sentence. The grammatical structure of the sentence seems to me to be the same whether the description is used referentially or attributively: that is, it is not syntactically ambiguous. Nor does it seem at all attractive to suppose an ambiguity in the meaning of the words; it does not appear to be semantically ambiguous. (Perhaps we could say that the sentence is pragmatically ambiguous: the distinction between roles that the description plays is a function of the speaker's intentions) (297).

- Donnellan argues against three of Strawson's claims.
  - ▸ Statements with a false existential presupposition are neither true nor false.
  - ▸ If no one fits the definite description, then the speaker has failed to refer.
  - ▸ The reason that a sentence may be neither true nor false is because of a failure to refer.
    - – But maybe for referential uses
    - – If I am hallucinating, I may fail to refer, even when I am speaking de re.
    - – These are a much more obscure type of sentence than Strawson thought, and minimally important.

The Attributive/Referential Distinction and Beliefs

- The difference between the two uses is not whether the speaker believes that the description fits a particular person.
  - ▸ "It is possible for a definite description to be used attributively even though the speaker (and his audience) believes that a certain person or thing fits the description. And it is possible for a definite description to be used referentially where the speaker believes that nothing fits the description" (290).
- I can believe that a particular person fits the description, and describe either attributively or referentially.
- Similarly, I can lack the belief that a particular person fits the description, and describe either attributively or referentially.
- Group exercise on next slide

	Speaker believes that the attribute holds of a particular person	Speaker does not believe that the attribute holds of a particular person
Referential Use	A	C
Attributive Use	B	D

The Attributive/Referential Distinction and Belief

- There are attributive uses in which we believe the description holds, and in which we do not.
- There are referential uses in which we believe the description holds, and in which we do not.
- SM Smith's murderer is insane.

	Speaker believes that the attribute holds of a particular person	Speaker does not believe that the attribute holds of a particular person
Referential Use	In the courtroom, someone looks at the defendant acting crazy, and says SM of that person.	Someone who believes that the man on a throne is a usurper, yet refers to him as 'the king'.
Attributive Use	Someone who says SM while believing that anyone who would have murdered Smith must be insane, even though s/he believes the murderer to be a particular person.	Someone who says SM believing that anyone who murdered Smith must be insane, while not believing that any particular person is the murderer.

De Re and *De Dicto*

- A phrase is used *de re* when it is about a person.
- A phrase is used *de dicto* when it is about the words.
- 'Ralph believes that someone is a spy.'
  - ‣ *De dicto*: there are spies
  - ‣ *De re*: Bernard J. Ortcutt is a spy.
- Not exactly attributive/referential, but close
  - ‣ Opaque contexts
  - ‣ Kripke: "Smith's murderer, whoever he is, is known to the police, but they're not saying."

Why Does the A/R Distinction Matter?

- Donnellan believes the attributive/referential distinction is a blow for the logical analysis of language.

- Any analysis of what is said depends not merely on the sentences used, and their meanings.

- Instead, it depends essentially and irreducibly on a speaker's intentions.
  - ‣ mental states

- Intentions are not the kinds of things available for logical analysis in any obvious way.

Saving the Logical Analysis of Language

- Frege believed that the appropriate media for truth values are propositions.
- Propositions can be as fine-grained as we want.
- The same sentence may express a wide range of propositions.
- So, SM can express either proposition SM1 or SM2.
  - ‣ SM1 that anyone who murdered Smith is insane
  - ‣ SM2 that the person in the jury box is insane
- Each of these propositions is available for logical, or semantic, analysis.
- The question of which proposition was expressed is a matter of pragmatics.
- The problem vanishes, for the ambiguity is merely one of natural language.
- The fine-grained propositions lack the ambiguity.

Donnellan and
the Revenge of 'Fido'-Fido

- Donnellan's referential use of definite descriptions (and names) recalls Mill's denotational view of names.

- Mill believed that names have no meaning.

- Their semantic value is just the object to which the name refers.

- Frege, Russell, and Strawson were descriptivists.
  - ‣ "It is no good using a name for a particular unless one knows who or what is referred to by the use of the name. A name is worthless without a backing of descriptions which can be produced on demand to explain that application" (Strawson, *Individuals* 20).

- Kripke revives what has come to be known as the direct reference theory of names.