

Lecture 04: Words and Things

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1. Knowledge of Reference (Part 2)

There is a common-sense picture of the relation between knowledge of reference and pattern of use. ... you use the word the way you do because you know what it stands for' (Campbell 2002, p. 4).

"On the common-sense picture, your knowledge of reference controls the pattern of use that you make of the term. You use the term the way you do because you know what it stands for. In the later Wittgenstein and in Quine, the problem is that they think the common-sense picture cannot be sustained. There is only the pattern of use: there is no such thing as a knowledge of reference which controls the pattern of use, and to which the pattern of use is responsible. In later Wittgenstein, the form the resulting problem takes is that the pattern of use now seems arbitrary, since it is no longer thought of as controlled by knowledge of reference. This is the issue he confronts in his discussion of rule-following. In Quine, the form the problem takes is that when we have only the pattern of use to consider, we find that it seems to leave under-determined the ascription of meaning to the terms of a language. This is Quine's problem of the indeterminacy of translation. In the ensuing discussion, amazingly, the common-sense

picture—that you use the word the way you do because you know what it stands for—is all but lost sight of" (Campbell 2002, p. 4)

'to attribute to a speaker no more than knowledge of how to play ... interlocking language games is to make him a participant in an activity he cannot survey ('cannot see what is going on')' (Dummett 1979, p. 224)

'On the model just sketched, one can use one's language [...] without any [...] notion of truth [or reference]. The instructions the mind follows, in this model, do not presuppose notions of the order of 'true'; they are instructions for [...] uttering, instructions for carrying out syntactic transformations, [...] etc. But the success of the 'language-using program' may well depend on the existence of a suitable correspondence between the words of a language and things The notions of truth and reference may be of great importance in explaining the relation of language to the world without being as central [...] as they are in [...] theories that equate understanding with knowledge of truth conditions. (Putnam 1978, p. 100)

Understanding a word can't be purely a practical ability because this would 'render mysterious our capacity to know whether we are understanding.' (Dummett 1991, p. 93)

Communication by language is 'a rational activity on the part of creatures to whom can be ascribed intention and purpose'.

We can, and should, distinguish 'those regularities of which a language speaker [utterer], acting as a rational agent engaged in conscious, voluntary action, makes use from those that may be hidden from him.' (Dummett 1978, p. 104)

2. Sense and Knowledge of Reference

'Frege's idea was that to understand an expression, one must not merely think of the reference that it is the reference, but that one must, in so thinking, think of the reference in a particular way. The way in which one must think of the reference of an expression in order to understand it is that expression's sense' (Evans 1985, p. 294)

3. Descriptions and Determiners

'What is the mechanism of reference? In other words, in virtue of what does a word (of the referring sort) attach to a particular object/individual?' (Reimer & Michaelson 2018).

"By a 'description' I mean any phrase of the form 'a so-and-so' or 'the so-and-so'. A phrase of the form 'a so-and-so' I shall call an 'ambiguous' [i.e. indefinite] description; a phrase of the form 'the so-and-so' (in the singular) I shall call a 'definite' description. Thus 'a man' is an ambiguous [i.e. indefinite] description, and 'the man with the iron mask' is a definite description" (Russell 1963, p. 205)

“The Theory of Descriptions has a natural place within a general theory of natural language quantification in which determiners like ‘some’, ‘all’, ‘a’, ‘the’, etc. are treated as members of a unified syntactical and semantical category” (Neale 1990, p. 48)

‘If I say “Ayesha is fluffy” that is a statement of the form “x is fluffy,” and it has Ayesha for its subject. But if I say “the smelliest cat in my house is fluffy,” that is not a statement of the form “x is fluffy,” and does not have “the smelliest cat in my house” for its subject. Abbreviating the statement made at the beginning of this article, we may put, in place of “the smelliest cat in my house,” the following: “One and only one entity is the smelliest cat in my house, and that cat is fluffy” (Russell 1905, p. 488)

“if I say ‘the table is covered with books’, I do not mean to be suggesting that there is only one table in the world. Unfortunately, that seems to be precisely what the Russellian theory of descriptions is committed to” (Ludlow 2004)

‘Determiners are rare in the world’s languages [...] even in languages that deploy determiners, it is not clear that the determiners are behaving as quantificational operators. ... For example, it is plausible to think that one central function of the definite determiner is to provide genitive case when needed’ (Ludlow 2004).

‘constructions of the form ‘the F’ and ‘an F’ are not only rare in natural languages, but po-

tentially misleading in languages like English. These expressions really don’t carry out the logical roles that Russell and subsequent authors have thought. However, Russell’s core insight remains intact: The critical question is whether the sentences in which they appear are quantificational or referential, and Russell may well be right about the critical cases here. That is, many apparently referential constructions may in fact be quantificational.’ (Ludlow 2004).

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