

# Lecture 03: Words and Things

s.butterfill@warwick.ac.uk

## 1. Sense and Reference (First Pass)

‘entities such as meanings ... are not of independent interest’ (Davidson 1984, p. 154)

‘What is stated in the proposition ‘Charly is Samantha’ is certainly not the same thing as the content of the proposition ‘Charly is Charly’. Now if what corresponded to the name ‘Samantha’ as part of the thought was the reference of the name and hence the woman herself, then this would be the same in both thoughts. The thought expressed in ‘Charly is Samantha’ would have to coincide with the one in ‘Charly is Charly’, which is far from being the case’ (Frege 1993, p. 44).

‘Someone who takes the latter to be true need not ... take the former to be true. An object can be determined in different ways, and every one of these ways of determining it can give rise to a special name, and these different names have different senses’ (Frege 1993, p. 44).

‘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).

## 2. Russell’s Argument on Acquaintance

*The Principle of Acquaintance:* ‘Every proposition which we can understand must be composed wholly of constituents with which we are acquainted’ (Russell 1963, p. 209)

‘Whenever a relation of supposing or judging occurs, the terms to which the supposing or judging mind is related by the relation of supposing or judging //p. 211// must be terms with which the mind in question is acquainted. This is merely to say that we cannot make a judgement or a supposition without knowing what it is that we are making our judgement or supposition about. It seems to me that the truth of this principle is evident as soon as the principle is understood’ (Russell 1963, pp. 210–11).

‘I think the theory that judgements consist of ideas ... is fundamentally mistaken. The view seems to be that there is some mental existent which may be called the ‘idea’ of something outside the mind of the person who has the idea, and that, since judgement is a mental event, its constituents must be constituents of the mind of the person judging. But in this view ideas become a veil between us and outside things—we never really, in knowledge, attain //p. 212// to the things we are supposed to be knowing about, but only to the ideas of those things. The relation

of mind, idea, and object, on this view, is utterly obscure ... I ... see no reason to believe that, when we are acquainted with an object, there is in us something which can be called the ‘idea’ of the object. On the contrary, I hold that acquaintance is wholly a relation, not demanding any such constituent of the mind as is supposed by advocates of ‘ideas’ (Russell 1963, pp. 211–12).

## 3. The Standard Route

‘we have acquaintance with anything of which we are directly aware, without the intermediary of any process of inference or any knowledge of truths’ (Russell 1912, chapter 5)

‘We have descriptive knowledge of an object when we know that it is the object having some property or properties with which we are acquainted; that is to say, when we know that the property or properties in question belong to one object and no more, we are said to have knowledge of that one object by description, whether or not we are acquainted with the object.’ (Russell 1963, p. 220)

## 4. Knowledge of Reference

‘A number of tools have this feature: that the instructions for use of the tool do not mention something that explains the successful use of the tool.

For example, the instructions for turning an

electric light on and off – ‘just flip the switch’ – do not mention electricity.

But the explanation of the success of switch-flipping as a method for getting lights to go on and off certainly does mention electricity.

It is in this sense that reference and truth have less to do with understanding language than philosophers have tended to assume’ (Putnam 1978, p. 99).

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)

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)

## References

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