

Strawson, “On Referring”

“Uniquely referring use” of an expression = standard use of names, demonstratives, pronouns, definite descriptors. Nonstandard uses: ‘The whale is a mammal’, ‘Napoleon was the greatest French soldier’

Russell: Only two ways that a subject-predicate sentence can be about a particular individual:

- (1) The sentence uses a definite description in logical form.
- (2) The sentence uses a logically proper name in logical form.

Strawson: An expression used in the uniquely referring way falls into neither class. Hence (?), there are no logically proper names, nor Russellian descriptions. (p. 248)

Terminology

‘Expression’ denotes an expression that has a uniquely referring use; ‘sentence’ refers to a sentence which has an expression as the subject-term.

Some distinctions: The same *sentence* ‘The king of France is wise’ could be *used* differently at different times (in relation to Louis XIV vs. Louis XV), though the same sentence can also be *used* in the same way by two different people, though in two different *utterances*. Consequence: Sentences are not true/false but rather their *uses*.

Analogously: expression vs. use of an expression vs. utterance of an expression. Hence: “‘Mentioning’, or ‘referring’, is not something an expression does; it is something that someone can use an expression to do” (p. 250).

Attack on Russell

Objection 1: Russell conflates a sentence/expression with uses: Contra Russell, to give the meaning of an expression/sentence is “to give *general directions* for its use” to refer or to assert truth/falsehood. “It is not to talk about any particular occasion of use” (ibid.)

Objection 2: Russell conflated meaning with reference, since he thought that the meaning of an expression (with a uniquely referring use) must be its referent. However: “If I talk about my handkerchief, I can...produce the object I am referring to out of my pocket. I cannot produce the meaning of the expression, ‘my handkerchief’”

Objection 3: Russell falsely claims that asserting ‘The king of France is wise’ would result in a truth or falsity. But: When asserting ‘The king of France is wise’, the question of truth/falsity does not arise since there is no such person. Still, the assertion would “imply” (though not *logically* imply) there is such a person; yet we are not *contradicting* the person in replying that there is no such person.

Strawson: To know the meaning of ‘The king of France is wise’ is to know the circumstances that make the assertion true/false. But since there is no king, the assertion fails to *say* anything; *a fortiori*, it fails to say anything true or false. (Cf. fictional uses.)

Objection 4: Russell: A definite description will “only have an application in the event of there being one table and no more.” Strawson: Obviously false. Though it is truistic if you add say “one table and no more *which is being referred to.*”

Objection 5: “To say there is some table or other to which you are referring is not the same as referring to a particular table” (p. 253) Distinguish: (1) using an expression to *refer* to a unique thing; (2) *asserting* that there exists one and only one thing with the relevant characteristics.

Donnellan, “Reference and Definite Descriptions”

- (1) *Contra Russell:* Russell did not recognize the “referential use” of a definite description (hereafter, a “DD”).
- (2) *Contra Strawson:* Strawson did not recognize that “there can be two possible uses of a definite description in the same sentence” (p. 265-6).
- (3) *Contra Both:* Both falsely assume that (a) we can identify the referent of a DD even when it is not being used, (b) a person using a DD assumes something meets the description (c) when a DD is empty, the truth-value of its containing sentence must be affected in one way. (Russell: the sentence is false; Strawson: the sentence is neither; Donnellan: it depends.)
- (4) *Contra Strawson (again):* Strawson fails to see that reference-failure with DDs does not go hand-in-hand with whether anything meets the description.

Against (3c): ‘The present King of France does not exist’ is true.

Against (3b): ‘Is de Gaulle the King of France [vs. the President]?’

Regarding (1), (2), (3a), (4):

“Attributive” use of DDs: when a person “states something about whoever or whatever is the so-and-so” (p. 267).

“Referential” use of DDs: when a person “uses the description to enable his audience to pick out whom or what he is talking about and states something about that” (ibid.)

Attributive DDs occur “essentially,” but a Referential DD “is merely one tool for doing a certain job—calling attention to a person or thing” (ibid.)

“Smith’s murderer is insane.”

The DD is used attributively if no one has any idea about who the murderer is. But if Jones is on trial for Smith’s murderer, then the DD might be used referentially.

Suppose Smith committed suicide, so that ‘Smith’s murderer’ is empty. Then, on the attributive use, we failed to attribute insanity to anyone. But on the referential use, we attributed insanity to Jones. That is so, even if the audience believes Jones is innocent.

Similarly with interrogatives and imperatives: “Who is the man drinking the martini?”
“Bring me the book on the table.”

If a DD is empty, a referential use presupposes that someone *in particular* satisfies the DD—whereas an attributive uses only presupposes that *someone or other* satisfies it. But still, the speaker's *beliefs* do not always fit these presuppositions.

- If I and everyone else falsely believes Jones is guilty, I might still use 'Smith's murder' attributively if I go on to argue that *anyone* who murdered Smith must be insane. My argument can be sound even if my belief that *Jones* is guilty is false.
- I might believe that a usurper occupies the throne, but still refer to him as 'the king'. It may be that even the audience thinks he's not the king—and it's even possible that none of us believe that *anyone* is the rightful king.

The referential use allows misdescription, not the attributive use. But if the DD is empty, the attributive use produces a "thwarted" speech-act—yet not always with the referential use. "For when the [DD] is used referentially, one's audience may succeed in seeing to what one refers even though neither it nor anything else fits the description" (p. 270). [Later, on p. 274, this point leads to a difference in *reports* of what a speaker says.]

Neither Russell nor Strawson characterize the referential use correctly.

For Russell, a sentence with a DD *entails* that some *x* satisfies the DD. When it does, the DD denotes *x*—but Russell fails to notice that a DD can *refer* to an *x* that it does not *denote*. So for Russell you can "refer" to a person without knowing it. (Goldwater case.)

Strawson maintains:

1. A sentence using a DD is neither true nor false if nothing satisfies the DD.
2. If nothing satisfies the DD, then the speaker has failed to refer.
3. 2. is the reason why 1. is true.

But these at best apply to only one of the two uses. 1. is possibly true of the attributive use (though not of the referential use), but 2. is simply false.

'Is the man carrying a walking stick the professor of history?' Donnellan: If I hallucinated the man, I have failed to refer. But it is not due to an object being misdescribed, but rather because nothing can be said to be "what I was referring to."

"In general, whether or not a definite description is used referentially or attributively is a function of the speaker's intentions in a particular case" (p. 272). No semantic or syntactic ambiguity, but a pragmatic ambiguity?

"the view...that sentences can be divided up into predicates, logical operators, and referring expressions is not generally true" (p. 273). But you can only use referentially the DD in 'Point out the man who is drinking my martini.'

Linksy: 'Her husband is kind to her' If 'her husband' is used referentially, the sentence could be true. Yet if we know the person is not her husband, we resist saying 'It is true that her husband is kind to her.' Donnellan: But that's b/c: "when a [DD] is used referentially there is a presumption that the speaker believes what he refers to fits the [DD]" (ibid.) Still, what exactly is "the statement" that the speaker made? (*De re/de dicto* confusion...)

Grice, “Logic and Conversation”

Formalist vs. Informalist:

Formalist: “the possession by the natural counterparts of those elements in their meaning, which they do not share with the corresponding formal devices, is to be regarded as an imperfection of natural language” (p. 171). “The proper course is to conceive and begin to construct an ideal language, incorporating the formal devices, the sentences of which will be clear, determinate in truth value, [etc.]” (p. 172)

Informalist: Asks whether “the primary yardstick by which to judge the adequacy of a language is its ability to serve the needs of science, that an expression cannot be guaranteed as fully intelligible unless an explication or analysis of its meaning has been provided...[which will] take the form of a precise definition that is the expression/assertion of a logical equivalence” (ibid.)

Implicature: ‘He likes his colleagues, and he hasn’t been to prison yet.’

“whatever B implied, suggested, meant, etc., in this example, is distinct from what B said, which was simply that C had not been to prison yet” (ibid.)

What is said = the conventional meaning of the words.

‘He is in the grip of a vice’ For a full identification of what was said, you need to know (a) the identity of *x*, (b) the time of utterance, (c) the meaning, on the particular occasion of utterance of the phrase ‘in the grip of a vice’ (“has a bad habit” vs. “caught in a certain type of tool”). Leaves open whether a change in co-referring terms causes a switch in what’s said (though such a switch can result in different implicatures).

Cooperative Principle: “Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged” (p. 173).

Four categories of maxim

Quantity: (1) “Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange),” (2) “Do not make your contribution more informative than is required” [(2) is subsumed the maxim of Relation]

Quality: “Try to make your contribution one that is true” (1) Do not say what you believe to be false, (2) “Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence”

Relation: “Be relevant”

Manner: “Be perspicuous” (1) Avoid obscurity of expression, (2) Avoid ambiguity, (3) Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity), (4) Be orderly.

Other: “Be polite.” But the previous four maxim-types all concern the maximally effective exchange of information.

Analogue maxims exist for actions (Grice is probably viewing speech as a special case of action...hence, as a speech-act theorist.)

Saying p implicates q if:

- (1) he is assumed to be observing the conversational maxims or CP,
- (2) he is aware that, or thinks that, [intending to communicate] q is required to make his saying p consistent with (1), and
- (3) the speaker thinks (and would expect the hearer to think that the speaker thinks) that it is within the competence of the hearer to work out, or grasp intuitively, that the supposition in (2) is required.

“C likes his colleagues, and hasn’t been to prison yet.”

“The audience A might reason about the speaker B: (1) B has apparently violated the maxim ‘Be relevant’ and so may be regarded as having flouted one of the maxims conjoining perspicuity, yet I have no reason to suppose that he is opting out of CP; (2) given the circumstances, I can regard his irrelevance as only apparent if, and only if, I suppose him to think that C is potentially dishonest; (3) B knows I am capable of working out step (2). So B implicates that C is potentially dishonest” (p. 176).

Three Groups of Examples

Group A: An implicature occurs without the violation of any maxim.

“I am out of petrol.” “There is a garage around the corner”

Group B: An implicature occurs because a maxim is violated, but the violation occurs only because of a clash with another maxim.

“Where does C live?” “Somewhere in the South of France”

Group C: An implicature occurs because a maxim is “exploited,” openly flouted.

The rec letter for a philosophy job. Tautologies: “war is war.” Irony, Metaphor, Meiosis, Hyperbole.

Five Other Important Features of Implicature:

- (1) They can be cancelled (e.g., by adding an explicit statement of its denial, indicating that you opt out of CP)
- (2) Some special locutions may have nondetachable implicatures, i.e., it is not possible to utter these locutions without the implicature (barring cancellation).
- (3) Implicatures are *not* part of the meaning of the relevant expressions.
- (4) Implicature results not from what is said, but rather the manner in which something is said. (That’s because what is said can be true while the implicature is false.)
- (5) What is implicated will be indeterminate if there is more than one explanation of how the speaker is observing CP despite appearances.