Pretending to Refer *

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1. Referring with Descriptions

        We communicate by performing speech acts. Some of them are locutionary and others are illocutionary. I will concentrate my attention on one type of locutionary acts, namely singular referring acts. According to Quine, they are inscrutable. The thesis was first developped in Word and Object.   A partial justification for it is the fact that all the so-called referential terms of a language can be paraphrased along the lines of Russell's theory of descriptions, a theory according to which a description can contextually be eliminated in terms of a general quantified existential formula. It is a well known fact that Quine generalized the theory to all the expressions of the language, and even to proper names. For instance, the term "Socrates", according to the account, becomes an abbreviation for "the Socratizer" which, in turn, is analysed à la Russell.
         How can we then account for our singular referring acts ? If Quine is right, how can we ever succeed to refer ? Is Quine ruling out the very possibility of a singular referential use ? The question parallels and old one that was once raised against Russell. Russell's theory of descriptions has been criticized by many authors on the grounds that it is unable to account for referential uses of definite descriptions
. Russell's theory stipulates that, strictly speaking, descriptions do not name anything when fully analysed in logical form. Logical analysis reveals that they are merely incomplete symbols and that they should   contextually be eliminated in terms of existential clauses. So it appears that these expressions cannot really function as singular terms. But it has been pointed out that we do sometimes use definite descriptions like singular terms. This "phenomenological" evidence suggests that Russell's theory must seriously be amended, unless we succeed in showing that the evidence in question is compatible with it. This is precisely what I intend to do. I would like to formulate a definition for singular referring uses of descriptions which is compatible with Russell's theory. My objective is to show that we could accept Russell's idea that definite descriptions are incomplete symbols while allowing for the possibility of singular referring uses. This can be claimed coherently as long as singular referring uses are understood as non-literal speech acts and therefore constitute essentially a pragmatic phenomenon, while Russell's theory is adequate when considered strictly from a semantic perspective. This paves the way for a vindication of Quine's own point of view. Singular reference itself becomes essentially a pragmatic phenomenon to be accounted for in terms of speaker's intentions. It remains true to say that, at the semantic level, reference is inscrutable. In other words we can only pretend   to refer.

2. Staging the problem

        By a singular referring use of the definite description, I mean a situation in which

the description is used as a singular term. But I do not intend to concentrate on Donnellan's specific notion of a referential use in which reference can take place even if the object does not exemplify the content of the description. I shall be concerned only with non-literal uses made in accordance with the literal meaning of expressions and shall therefore require that the referent satisfies the description. In any case, this was not the essential aspect of Donnellan's criticisms against Russell's theory. His essential point was that descriptions can sometimes be used as singular terms. This is so even if they refer via their descriptive meaning, as Frege's proper names refer via a descriptive meaning while belonging to the category of singular terms.

As suggested, the line of argument I intend to follow is that the existence of singular referring uses does not by itself provide evidence against Russell's theory. For the sake of argument, I will suppose that Russell's theory is correct. My intention is not to defend it as such but rather to show that certain popular criticisms made against it do not succeed to prove its failure. The general strategy adopted here is similar to that of Kripke and Neale
. Like Kripke, I want to suggest that referential uses of definite descriptions belong strictly to the pragmatic realm and can be conceived as complementary and compatible with Russell's semantic account. But my argument differs from Kripke's in at least two respects. First, Kripke is essentially concerned with Donnellan's notion of referential uses whereas I am not. Secondly, and more crucially, Kripke would like to retain, as semantically meaningful, formulas expressing de re   modalities without imposing an interpretation that differs from the standard one. As far as descriptions are concerned, this involves, first, allowing them to have "primary occurrence" in modal formulas. When they are analysed à la Russell, the quantifier which results from the contextual elimination of the description has large scope and binds a variable occurring inside the modal operator. If so, descriptions do seem to behave sometimes as singular terms because the externally quantified variables are either "rigid" or "vivid" designators (borrowing on terminology first introduced by Kripke and Kaplan, respectively) depending on whether the intensional context involves a logical or an epistemic modality. Under a standard interpretation, those variables function semantically like singular terms. This is particularly obvious for quantified modal statements but it is true even in non-modal cases. Quantified modal statements only serve to prove that this standard interpretation is seemingly unavoidable. Therefore, a speaker who asserts literally an existential statement in a de re   modality will use the variable implicitly contained in the description as a singular term. This, as we shall see later, entails presupposing the existence of the object, as well as presupposing an independent procedure for its identification, and presupposing finally either a principle of identity or anything that fixes the identity of the object.

In de re   modal formulas, descriptions in primary occurrence behave semantically as complex singular terms because, under that interpretation, variables have existential presuppositions, entail a previous identification of the objects and have a determinate domain of entities in their range. This standard property of variables then extends to definite descriptions if the latter are analysed in a Russellian manner. But since I want to show that descriptions can only be used non-literally as singular terms, it means that I do not want to interpret variables in a standard way. By the same token a different interpretation of de re   formulas (epistemic or alethic) is required.

My concept of a referential use for definite descriptions therefore has a larger extension than that of Kripke. He would like to treat a description occurring in wide scope in a modal statement as an expression used attributively (if used literally) . His main reason for treating this case as a case of an attributive use seems to be that the descriptive content of the expression determines the referent. But Fregean proper names, as it was pointed out, do satisfy this condition and are still to be regimented in the category of singular terms, i.e. of expressions that genuinely denote their referents.

In the case of Russell's theory, descriptions are at first sight contextually eliminated, but this amounts to very little if the variable contained in the description is fully referential, for the description would then look very much like a demonstrative construction in logical form. Russell's idea is supposed to be that descriptions are merely incomplete symbols and there should not be anything left in the logical form which looks like a logical name, variables included. It is true that Russell actually believed that an ultimate analysis always led to logical atoms, i.e. names for simples, but this is something prescribed by his philosophy of language as a whole and is not a consequence of his theory of descriptions. The theory of descriptions in itself involved the claim that descriptions can be eliminated in terms of incomplete symbols only. I shall therefore restrict the notion of an attributive use of descriptions to a use in which the expression is seen not to "denote" anything at all and is instead eliminated in terms of incomplete symbols only. In this way we capture Donnellan's important observation according to which an attributive use is not a singular referring use at all .

Let me emphasize that Russell himself wanted to allow primary occurrences for definite descriptions . And, most significantly, he thought logical names could be substituted to descriptions in such circumstances even in the context of epistemic formulas. Russellian logical names are perhaps not "rigid" in Kripke's sense, but they still refer to determinate entities since their referents are ontological atoms. In addition, they have existential presuppositions and imply a direct acquaintance with objects. Thus they satisfy our criterion for singular reference when used literally and if descriptions have occurrences in which they function just like logical names, there would seem to be, after all, instances of singular referring occurrences for descriptions. There would be cases in which they behave semantically as logical names, even for Russell. But I prefer to take a hard line on this issue and remove any influence of an external doctrine on the theory of descriptions itself, whether it is logical atomism, the doctrine of singular propositions or the theory of sense-data. I limit myself to Russell's theory of descriptions and I am not concerned with his philosophy of language as a whole.

It is only under such an interpretation that Russell's claim according to which he has succeeded to eliminate descriptions in terms of incomplete symbols can be taken seriously. Carrying out Russell's program successfully will then require a somewhat "heretic" interpretation of variables and quantified formulas. But does it mean that rejecting the semantic   meaningfulness of singular referring uses for descriptions must go hand in hand with a rejection of quantified modal and epistemic logics? Not quite. I am here mostly concerned with sentences containing definite descriptions and I cannot draw general conclusions from considerations pertaining to these expressions only. It remains to be seen whether proper names, for instance, can be semantically regimented as

genuine singular terms. But let's suppose that they are not and that a general doctrine of "incomplete symbols" is true, i.e. a doctrine that stipulates that no expression can behave semantically as a singular term. Under those circumstances, there is still, as we shall see, a sense in which we can quantify inside the scope of modal or epistemic operators without using the bound variable as a singular term. I will try to show that we can do this in the case of belief sentences and epistemic formulas in general.

My main purpose is to show that singular referring uses are non-literal. This requires a characterization in terms of speaker's reference. However, as soon as we try to formulate this kind of definition, we find ourselves, as we shall see, quantifying inside the scope of epistemic operators. In such a context we seem to be using singular referring variables and it could then be claimed that we are in fact presupposing the very notion we are trying to define. It is only for that reason that I will allow for an interpretation of quantified modal formulas that preserves their semantic meaningfulness while not allowing for the quantified variables to behave as singular terms.

3. Three necessary conditions for speaker's singular reference

Let us first distinguish between reference performed with the use of a singular term and reference performed with the use of an existential clause since two quite different notions of reference are here at play. We shall suppose for a second that we have in our language terms that function exactly like individual constants. We do that only in order to determine what is involved in singular reference. We first note that when we use these terms, we always presuppose the existence of the individual thus denoted. Existence is never asserted in referential acts performed with the use of those terms. By contrast, in the use of an existential clause, what is going on is precisely an existential claim. I shall call this first condition on singular reference the existence condition. It is a condition on speech acts of singular reference and it stipulates that a speaker must presuppose the existence of the object
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Secondly, with the use of a singular term, we always presuppose an independent method of identification for the object denoted. We always use the term in order to attract the hearer's attention to an object "given in advance". This does not mean that we must necessarily have a previous direct knowledge of the object. It is rather that we simply presuppose reference has already been fixed independently of the use of the name. The identification could have been made by ostension, by a causal chain, through direct knowledge or via uniquely identifying descriptions that fix the sense or the referent of the name, it does not matter here. And it is not even important to determine whether the speaker should be aware of the existence of a particular identifying procedure. My point is simply that we always presuppose the existence of such a particular method of identification and therefore presuppose that the referent of the name has already been identified or could be so identified in a certain way. This is not the case when we assert an existential clause. Existential formulas are, paradigmatically, vehicles for "knowledge by description" and they do not necessarily presuppose, for that reason, any previous identification of the object referred to. I shall call this condition on singular reference the uniqueness condition. It stipulates that the speaker must presuppose the existence of a uniquely identifying procedure for the object denoted.

Finally, the use of a singular term always guarantees a determinate reference. That is, we always presuppose that the identity of the object referred to is fixed in all possible worlds or in all the worlds in which the object exists. This can be done with or without the aid of an associated principle of identity, depending on whether the term has connotation or not. It does not matter here how determinacy is ensured. The point is that singular reference as it is defined here involves determinate reference. This contrasts with the use of existential clauses in which an indeterminate reference is taking place. If we conform to what seems to be Russell's semantic characterization of quantified formulas, the "subject" or "topic" in these clauses is an indeterminate logical subject. Variables refer in an indeterminate way to their referents. In the terminology of possible world semantics, we should say that Russellian quantified formulas are "world indexed". Their domain is simply constituted by objects in a world whose identity is left undetermined.

To make the distinction between determinate and indeterminate reference more precise, we could compare Russell and Lewis. There is no such thing as rigidity or reference "through all possible worlds" in Lewis' theory, but variables have for him a determinate reference anyway. It has been decided that objects exist only in one possible world and that they have properties only in that world. It makes no sense for Lewis to say that objects have properties in worlds in which they don't exist. They don't even have the property of self-identity in these worlds. Lewis rejects the necessity of identity if it is interpreted de re. It is true when interpreted de dicto because it simply means that, in each possible world, objects are self-identical. But it is meaningless when interpreted de re, because it makes no sense to say of an object that it has a property in a world in which it does not exist and that includes the property of self-identity.

The formulas that traditionally express the de re necessity of identity will certainly come out true in Lewis' account but it does not mean that a given object has the property of self-identity through all possible worlds. It is rather understood as conveying the information that the object and all its counterparts are self-identical. Since all these decisions have already been made, the identity of the object has already been fixed in the formal ontology. The formulas of a Lewisian language range over a fixed domain of determinate entities. The domain is the set of all possible worlds with their respective domains of objects that do not intersect with each other. The domain does not transcend possible worlds, but is still a determinate one. In Lewis' theory, quantified formulas are not world-indexed
. The comparison with Lewis is useful because it helps us to clarify the distinction between indeterminate reference (indexed to a possible world) and determinate reference (whether objects exist in many possible worlds or not).

I shall call this condition on singular reference the determinacy condition. It stipulates that a speaker can refer singularly to an object only if he presupposes that the identity of the object has been fixed. He must presuppose the existence of a principle of identity or something equivalent.

The determinacy condition must not be confused with the uniqueness condition. The latter makes reference to the existence of an associated principle of identification while the former indicates at best the existence of an associated principle of identity for the object. The two must be distinguished conceptually even if we were to defend ultimately an anti-realist slogan like "No identity without identification".

We now have three major differences between reference performed with the use

of a singular term and reference performed with the use of an existential clause. On the basis of these differences, we could formulate necessary conditions for the success of singular reference. A singular referring use can be made only if existence, uniqueness and determinacy conditions are presupposed by the speaker. Where these presuppositions are absent, we do not have a singular referring use. We may call it an attributive use.

What I earlier called the "standard interpretation" of variables is one in which they function semantically as singular terms in the way just described. In a standard interpretation, variables semantically presuppose existence, uniqueness and determinacy. The non-standard interpretation I favour is one in which these features are absent. I will therefore adopt a semantical approach in which variables do not carry existential, uniqueness and determinacy presuppositions.

One last comment before moving on to the next section. It could be claimed that I am imposing very strong requirements on singular reference. Intuitively, we seem to be able to achieve singular reference without imposing such constraints. In our every day uses of proper names and definite descriptions, we may perhaps intuitively be presupposing the satisfaction of these conditions. But surely, we do not mean to say that successful reference could take place only if these conditions were objectively satisfied. But far from counting as an objection, this answer confirms my initial hypothesis. My claim is that, at the semantic level, there is no such thing as a singular term that would objectively satisfy the three conditions. In that sense, there is no such thing as true singular reference. But we do sometimes use expressions (including definite descriptions) with similar pragmatic presuppositions. If this is the only way in which we can be said to refer, then it proves my point that we can only pretend to refer and that we never really achieve singular reference. We may choose to call "singular reference" cases in which we carry these presuppositions even if they are not objectively satisfied. Far from creating trouble for the present approach, it confirms its main contention.

4. Interpreting Russell's theory

Since there is phenomenological evidence to the effect that definite descriptions can be used as singular terms, it seems to follow that the Russellian proposal cannot be right. It does not seem reasonable to suppose both that they can be used to achieve singular reference and that they are to be analysed à la Russell.   But is that really so? In what follows, I hope to remove at least some of the justifications for drawing such a conclusion. The key point in the argument is that descriptions do not semantically presuppose the existence, uniqueness and determinacy clauses, but speakers who use descriptions often can presuppose such things.

If one considers only Principia Mathematica instead of Russell's philosophy of language as a whole, one notices the presence of a non-standard account for variables and quantified formulas that motivates a semantic account of definite descriptions according to which they have only an attributive use and not a referential use. It could be replied however that Russell never wanted to formulate non-standard views for variables and quantified formulas in such a "hard line" manner and not even in Principia Mathematica. First, the language of Principia Mathematica is, notoriously, a language with existential

presuppositions. The presuppositions appear because formulas with "real" variables can be asserted in isolation, as suggested in the first edition of the work
. Asserting an open formula amounts to asserting an ambiguous value fo the propositional function and such an assertion can either be used for universal instantiation or it can serve as a basis for existential and universal generalizations
. This is made possible solely because real variables carry with them existence presuppositions.

But in the second edition of the work, Russell no longer holds that open formulas can be asserted in isolation and these assertions are now seen as abbreviations for the assertions of their universal generalizations
. We can still prove existential formulas but, at this point, only through the introduction of logical names in the language. The change is important, in my view, because free variables no longer have existential presuppositions.

It could also be replied that, for Russell, knowledge by description is ultimately just a species of knowledge by acquaintance
. Logical atomism requires that all knowledge be ultimately reduced to direct knowledge and so there does not seem to be in Russell's mind a boundary as sharp as the one I was trying to draw between the two sorts of knowledge. But I insist in distinguishing conceptually these different doctrines and to discuss the theory of descriptions in isolation from the other Russellian doctrines. My point here is that Russell's empiricist epistemology is responsible for the conflation between the two fundamental sorts of knowledge and that it is not something prescribed by some structural aspects of the theory of descriptions.

One last criticism of the claim that Russell's semantics for definite descriptions are non-standard is the one we mentioned earlier in our discussion. Russell's own motivation for allowing primary occurrences of descriptions was that they do sometimes behave as logical names. For example, George IV could, according to Russell, wonder about the author of Waverley whether he was identical with Scott
. George IV could then be reported as wondering whether Scott was Scott, where the name "Scott" is interpreted as functioning just like a logical name. The description, in that case, is perhaps not a logical name but the variable implicitely contained in it behaves just like a logical name in the context
. And because of this fact, the variable seems to involve determinacy. In my view, this merely reveals the tension between two different doctrines held by Russell and not something inherent to the theory of descriptions. Strictly in the perspective of the theory of descriptions, the substitution of a description by a logical name should not be allowed. Exegetical issues aside, there remains much interest in showing that a theory of descriptions understood in the radical sense I suggest here is able to accommodate the fact that speakers can use definite descriptions as singular terms. This is precisely what I will now try to show.

The non-standard interpretation that I favour is one in which formulas are indexed to the world of utterance. They are interpreted against the background of an indeterminate domain of entities. These entities do not have a determinate ontological status. In a way, this is just repeating the main thesis of Quine's doctrine of the relativity of ontology. Quine has argued that to be is to be the value of bound variables of existential formulas in the regimented language of an empirical theory. But the idea that ontology is relative

goes far beyond than this initial claim. It suggests that the ontology of a theory can only make sense against a background theory and only relative to a manual of translation. Without such a background theory and without a manual of translation, variables and formulas containing them do not have any ontological import. This is what I tried to express by suggesting, perhaps in a non Quinean way, that the non-standard semantic approach that I favour is one   in which formulas are "world-indexed".

5. Dedramatizing de re   attitudes

The reason for making such a distinction between standard and non standard uses of variables should be clear. In our pragmatic definition for the referential use of definite descriptions, we shall need to use epistemic formulas in which quantifying in occurs. As I said, if the interpretation is standard, the externally quantified variable becomes a vivid designator in Kaplan's sense
 And it will look as though we are presupposing in the very semantics of the language the notion that we are trying to define, i.e. that of a referring use.
When externally quantified variables are understood in the sense involving vividness, de re   attitudes become problematic
. De re attitudes seem to involve, in that case, a particular relation to an object, an epistemic intimacy that suggests a privileged access to the thing itself. In other words, it seem to suggest that the variable behaves just like a singular term. This is no longer true once the quantified variable is interpreted in a non standard sense. A belief about the author of Waverley is just an attitude which is indeterminately about the author of Waverley. For that reason, the externally quantified variable does not behave as a special kind of singular term used by George IV since the report does not serve to transcend George IV's mental representations, and neither does it serve to refer to those mental representations. Reference is left indeterminate.   As long as world-indexed formulas are used, there is no longer any reason to read the externally quantified variables as special sorts of singular terms. They are only bound variables per se, entering in existential clauses that assert the existence of something, occurring in these clauses to convey a knowledge by description, and standing indeterminately for objects.
With this idea of world-indexed formulas, we have succeeded in providing an analysis of de re attitudinal constructions that ties in nicely with our view of the inscrutability of reference. Our epistemic formulas do not involve existential, uniqueness, or determinacy presuppositions and this is partly because they are world indexed. This insight is kept intact in our account of attitudes even when interpreted de re. De re   belief ascriptions no longer serve the purpose of reproducing the agent's inner relation to objects and so cannot serve to represent a particular use of the variable. My hope is rather to define the referential use of descriptions in terms of speakers' attitudes. In that definition, it will be essential to make use de re attitudes as well as beliefs that can play the role of presuppositions made by the speaker and this is why it is crucial to avoid reintroducing by the back door expressions that behave semantically as singular terms.

6. Paving the way for a Russellian account

Returning now to our main theme, we remember that we were confronted with an apparent difficulty. We have, on the one hand, clear cases of singular referential uses for definite descriptions; but we are told by Russell, on the other hand, that these expressions must contextually be eliminated in terms of existential clauses. Given our criterion for a singular referring use, the two claims seem to be inconsistent with each other. However, let us first notice that Russell should recognize that descriptions can be ambiguous as to their scope in sentences like:

(I) John says that the teacher of Plato is mortal

He fully acknowledges scope ambiguities within propositional attitude sentences and should consistently do the same for sentences containing locutionary verbs. We should then accept that, in general, descriptions can have primary, secondary, or even intermediary occurrences in such contexts (when the descriptions occur in the context of sentences in which an attitudinal or locutionary verb is iterated). This means that the existential clauses can be given either wide, narrow or intermediary scope in these contexts. And it appears that even if sentences containing definite descriptions are regimented as existential clauses, a speaker can assert these sentences without intentionally asserting the existential clause contained in it.

There are at least two different ways in which (I) can be interpreted. The first concern the possibility of reporting what is said by the speaker in a de dicto sense. In another sense, (I) could be read de re. The description would then have a primary occurrence and the existential clause would lie outside the scope of the locutionary verb. Since the clause is outside the scope of the verb, it is not part of what was said. We are now beginning to see how a Russellian elimination of the description is compatible with the idea that the speaker does not assert the existential clause. (I) can be used to express either:

(II) John says that ($x) [(x is teacher of Plato) L
        (y) (y is teacher of Plato in C ∫ y = x) L (x is mortal)]

(III) ($x) (x is teacher of Plato) L (y) (y is teacher of Plato in C ∫ y = x) L
        (John says that x is mortal)]

A few remarks are in order at this point to clarify what takes place in our paraphrases. First, we leave the impression that the locutionary verb is an operator on sentences because it is easier to read this way, but it could (and should) ultimately be read as a predicate of sentences (opened or closed).

Secondly, the Russellian uniqueness condition is amended so as to account for the fact that the definite article functions in natural languages as an indexical expression. It does not serve to refer to a unique so and so but rather to a unique so and so in the context ("in C"). This does not mean that Russell's account is wrong but rather simply that (II) or (III) are not the ultimate logical forms for (I). If Russell is right, (II) and (III) could themselves be paraphrased in terms of formulas in which the uniqueness clause is not tied to the context. Russell never pretended that his own paraphrases were directly

applicable without concern for the context of use. Recall that his own paraphrases apply only to formulas in an intermediary logical language
. We must note that his own analysis of the definite article can be interpreted as an analysis needed in an ideal language and not as a direct account of the definite article in ordinary language. So our "amendment" to the Russellian uniqueness condition does not show any defect in the theory.

My last remark on those paraphrases is that the two readings are harmless as an account of the content of beliefs. They cannot be seen as representing what the speaker has in mind. In particular, they do not suggest that the speaker somehow masters a logical language.   It is a bad argument even against those who use logical forms to represent what the speaker has in mind because for those philosophers, the paraphrases are taken merely as a perspicuous way of representing what the speaker believes, thinks, etc. without implying anything concerning the "inner" syntactic structure of the speaker's mental representations. In short, the notational aspect of the form is an artefact of the model for what is understood by the speaker. Very often, the rejection of logical forms by ordinary language philosophers is founded upon that simple mistaken interpretation of formal semantics.

(III) will prove useful in our definition for the referential use performed by John when he utters "The teacher of Plato is mortal". It guarantees that the referential use is not only attempted but successful. I shall call it the Success condition.

We shall now examine how the additional conditions previously discussed enter into the picture. As we shall see, they enter into the definition under an intermediary scope.   Intermediary occurrences are interesting because they enable us to represent the presuppositions of speakers. Imagine, for instance, that John utters "the teacher of Plato is mortal" and represents himself as predicating mortality to him. In logical form, we have:

(IV)   John believes that ($z) [(z is teacher of Plato) L
                    (w) (w is teacher of Plato in C ∫ w = z) L (John says that z is
mortal)]

In (IV), the variable 'z' is bound from outside the scope of the saying operator in the third conjunct but inside the belief context. The quantifier that binds this variable has intermediary scope. Such a characterization of John's beliefs enables us to represent him as entertaining certain presuppositions in his act of saying.

7. Steps toward a definition

We remember that three necessary conditions were imposed on the success of singular referring uses for any expression. These were the existence, uniqueness, and determinacy conditions. The first two are a reflection, at the pragmatic level, of what is, according to Russell, part of the literal meaning of sentences with descriptions. The problem here is to show how a speaker could presuppose something that can only be asserted if he is speaking literally and how he could fail to assert what is in the literal meaning of the sentence asserted. A speaker who utters a sentence containing a definite description uses a sentence that expresses existential and uniqueness clauses but does not necessarily assert these clauses. He can, for instance, believe that there is a unique so and

so about whom he says he is such and such. And if he does so, he presupposes the existence and uniqueness clauses literally contained in the sentence and therefore does not really "assert" them.

This, however, is not quite a satisfactory answer. We have to assume that the speaker is semantically competent if our definition is to have any interest. Otherwise, the claim that a speaker could fail to assert what is literally expressed by the sentence would become trivial. But it is hard to see how semantic competence could be accounted for without assuming that the speaker is aware of what he is saying. It seems that in uttering a sentence containing a description, a semantically competent speaker should realize that he asserts an existential statement. The ditficulty, then, is as follows: if the speaker is semantically competent and utters "p", then he represents himself as asserting that p. It seems that, where semantic competence is assumed, a speaker cannot fail to assert the sentence he utters in his own language. And if what he asserts is in logical form a Russellian formula, how could he fail to assert it ?

The solution is to ramify the "sense" of sentences into linguistic meaning ("character") and content. I am here alluding to Kaplan's distinction
. A semantically competent speaker only grasps the character of sentences and not necessarily their truth conditions (content). This is obvious in the case of indexical sentences. I could understand the sentence "I will come tomorrow" without understanding that Mary will come on the 31st of December even if Mary is the person who said this on the 30th. And if a similar distinction is applied across the board to all other sentences of the language, a semantically competent speaker does not need to know the content expressed by what he utters.

Now logical form reveals the structure of the content of sentences and not their character. And so a semantically competent speaker need not "grasp" the logical form of sentences but only their character. For example, John need not know that the postulate of ontological commitment is associated to the predicate "x is mortal" and that it induces a contextual elimination of the description in terms of an existential clause, and he need not know that a particular individual is said to be the only teacher of Plato in the context. Still, the sentence he uttered will be true if and only if there exists an individual in the context who is a unique so and so teaching to Plato and is mortal.

The Russellian proposal amounts to the claim that an assertion of a sentence containing a description turns out to be in fact the assertion of existential and uniqueness clauses. We do not have to deny the speaker's semantic competence in order to justify the claim that he could fail to assert these clauses explicitely. We are rather considering a situation in which the speaker represents himself as presupposing these clauses.

In order to obtain a referential use, we have to incorporate an additional clause into the presuppositions of the speaker. It is one that departs from the literal meaning of the sentence. We represent it as the belief that $(\$x) [(... y = x) L (Nec y = x)]$. It is the determinacy condition and it is specifically located in a modal conjunct of the whole formula. This modal clause, like any other clause in the language is world-indexed. It cannot serve to express, without any additional premise, the traditional thesis of the necessity of identity. We only get that the identity of x and y is necessarily true relatively to a world. It does not imply that a determinate object is necessarily identical to itself because it is not about determinate objects. The variables refer here like anywhere else to objects in an indeterminate way. The statement does not semantically presuppose

determinacy but merely asserts it. Determinacy is not semantically presupposed by the variables but it is asserted by the modal clause that the agent presupposes. The statement refers indeterminately to objects and says of them that they are determinate, whatever they are. The metaphysical issues regarding the notion of identity are not involved here yet because it is not yet clear how determinacy is to obtain. There is still room to argue for the necessity of identity (Kripke), the contingency of identity (Gibbard) or to reject altogether identity through possible worlds (Lewis).

Our modal clause simply stipulates that the objects referred to have a determinate nature. In its generality, the thesis is expressed by (x) ($y) [(x=y) L (Nec x=y)]. It is not a logical truth but it could be accepted without any commitment to the necessity of identity because it is world-indexed. The traditional metaphysical doctrines would only follow given additional meta-theoretical principles. For example, if it is stipulated that identity is a primitive (undefined) and absolute relation, its necessity can hardly be denied. But if identity is treated as relative to a criterion or if it is defined, this could lead respectively to the contingency of identity or to a denial of identity through possible worlds.

A speaker who utters a sentence containing a description literally does not perform a referential use of the description. But under appropriate circumstances, he could refer singularly to an object in accordance with the literal meaning of the sentence as long as his act of saying involves existential, uniquenesss and non-literal determinacy presuppositions. The determinacy formula on the other hand expresses only the idea that the object referred to is determinate without involving any claim as to what makes it determinately so. This account represents fairly well the phenomenological evidence alluded to at the outset of the paper. It accords with the fact that speakers may (but need not) perform referential uses of descriptions and it does so without imposing on those speakers an implicit commitment to a deep metaphysical doctrine.

The problem remains however to see in what sense a speaker could mean something non-literally contained in the sentence he is using. The three presuppositions are all additional to what the speaker literally expresses because he does not need to have them in order to speak literally. The first two presuppositions reflect at the level of pragmatics the information contained in the sentence but they are still not needed. After all, the speaker could have used the description attributively in which case he would not have to entertain the beliefs that we have just described. In a sense, all three presuppositions have the property of all pragmatic presuppositions: they are cancellable.

These three presuppositions will be "meant" by the speaker only if he intends the hearer to recognize what he is presupposing. We must also add that the hearer must actually recognize them. In this way, we can account for the possibility of meaning something that is not literally contained in the description.

For our definition, we need the Gricean concept of M-intention
. The speaker must intend the hearer to recognize what he is presupposing and must also intend the hearer to recognize that he has such an intention of recognition. Finally, he must also intend that part of the hearer's reasons for believing that the speaker has those presuppositions is the speaker's intention of recognition. We can abbreviate this threefold intention as the speaker's M-intention and call it the Gricean Condition.

The hearer must then recognize the three presuppositions by the speaker. That is, he must know that the speaker believes the existence, uniqueness and determinacy clauses. He must also recognize the speaker's intention of recognition and this latter

intention must be part of his reasons for believing that the speaker has those presuppositions. We can abbreviate this condition by saying that the hearer must recognize what is M-intented by the speaker and call it the Uptake condition.

No further conditions are required. In particular, it is not necessary for the hearer to believe that there is in fact a unique individual about whom the speaker says something. He could think that there is no such person as the teacher of Plato but this would not prevent John from using the description referentially as long as there is in fact such an individual. We slightly depart from Grice in our definition also because we are not attempting a partly causal account of speaker's meaning. The connection between the speaker's intentions and the hearer's recognitions is not causal but logical. The hearer's recognition is described in such a way that corresponds exactly to the content of the speaker's intentions.

Another difference with Grice is that we require that uptake be secured. It seems obvious to require that the hearer recognize the speaker's intentions to refer determinately. In our account, singular reference has to be public if it is to prevail at all. A final important difference is that we obviously do not want to reduce sentence meaning to speaker's meaning. It is not our purpose to avoid semantical relations in our definition. We use the Gricean concept of M-intention only as a tool in "pure pragmatics" and not in the course of an attempt to dissolve the distinction betwen semantics and pragmatics. Our intention is not to contribute to the Gricean program as a whole, as Schiffer does for example
, but rather simply to investigate a certain pragmatic phenomenon that is additional to the semantical realm.

8.- The Definition

We have now arrived at our definition. John makes a successful referential use of the description "the teacher of Plato" in uttering "the teacher of Plato is mortal" if and only if:

1) ($z) [(z is teacher Plato) L (w) (w is teacher of Plato in C ∫ w = z) L (John says z is mortal)]

(the Success condition)

2) John believes that ($u) [(u is teacher of Plato) L (v) (v is teacher of Plato in C ∫ v = u) L (Nec v = u) L (John says u is mortal)]

(the Existence, Uniqueness and Determinacy conditions)

3) John M-intends the hearer to recognize 3)

(the Gricean condition)

4) The hearer recognizes what is M-intended by John.

(the Uptake condition)

The definition should be slightly modified so as to account for the possibility of successfully performing a singular referring use even when the speaker has not finished his utterance of the whole sentence
.

9.- Strawson and other critics

The definition enables us to account for the speaker's singular referring uses of descriptions while clearly using only the semantic resources of a Russellian language. It has, in my view, a great advantage over Strawson's own explanation. In his second paper on the subject, Strawson admits that there are cases where a Russellian account of descriptions is adequate
. In other words, there are, according to Strawson, clear cases where John could intentionally be making an attributive use of the description in his utterance of the same sentence.
This will be so if and only if:

1)John says that ($x) [(x is teacher of Plato) L (y) (y is teacher of Plato in C ∫
    y = x) L (x is mortal)]

2) John believes that John says that ($z) [(z is teacher of Plato) L (w) (w is teacher of Plato in C ∫ w = z) L (z is mortal)]

But Strawson wrongly thought that differences in use determine differences at the level of logical form. I think I have shown that this implicit premise in Strawson's argument is wrong. I gave definitions for the referential and attributive uses of descriptions but I make use only of the resources of a Russellian language in these definitions. Those who would like to defend Strawson's conclusion would have to argue that there are certain "contexts" in which descriptions can be regimented in a Russellian way and other "contexts" in which they must be construed as singular terms. The argument has the unfortunate disadvantage of making central an obscure and undefined notion of context.
Strawson's so-called refutation is sometimes justified by a pseudo Wittgensteinian rejection of the delimitation between semantics and pragmatics that leads to nihilism as far as semantic theorizing is concerned. However it is in fact based upon a genuinely anti-Wittgensteinian principle according to which there is an individualistic fact of the matter about meaning and understanding. This is shown by the naive confidence that these ordinary language philosophers entertain about use as "evidence" for meaning. The fact is that no such evidence is available that can by itself suffice to falsify a semantic theory. My definitions show on the contrary that the phenomenological evidence against Russell can be accommodated within his theory. Moreover, the interesting thing is that it can be accommodated within a unitary theory.
The first analytic philosophers wrongly thought that there could be such a thing as

a universal language that transcends times, communities and "language games". The late Wittgenstein clearly saw that such an idealization of language was illusory. But we should not interpret it as announcing the dissolution of the distinction between semantics and pragmatics. The distinction is on the contrary an essential ingredient in the private language argument. Wittgenstein's philosophical views on language entail a sort of relativism towards semantic theories in general, but not a rejection of semantic theory building. Semantic theories still provide the rules of the language game that a given community decides to play. We must therefore not confuse semantic relativism with semantic nihilism. Semantic relativism urges us to uncover the goals and purposes behind the choice of particular semantic theories. It should then be part of a Wittgensteinian approach to show that many "incompatible" semantic theories can work out fine depending upon our desiderata. Russell's theory should certainly be one of them.

One of the essential points behind Wittgenstein's view of language is revealed by the plural in the word "language games". Actual uses of given speakers can hardly provide the basis for the correct acount of language in a way emphasized by ordinary language philosophers. Their anti-theoretic view prescribes that no unitary semantic theories is possible but this is not Wittgenstein's point. It is rather that many unitary semantic theories are possible. The choice is ultimately normative and not revealed in a transparent way by use. My only hope is to have removed some of the reservations about the theory of descriptions and perhaps also to have generated new doubts in the mind of those who thought that it had been refuted by Strawson.

Now imagine that, along with Quine, we generalize Russell's theory of descriptions to all the so-called "referring expressions" and that we adopt Quine's views about ontological relativity. It would turn out that there is no such thing as singular reference at the level of semantics. But I have also shown how it is still possible at the same time to account for our "singular referring uses". Singular reference is therefore never literally achieved and the conclusion is that we can only pretend   to refer.

Notes

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K.S. Donnellan, ibidem, p. 242, 247

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ample since, in such a case, reference is a matter of pretense. The existential presupposition still accompanies such a pseudo-referring act, it is just that it is itself made in the context of a pretense. that is being being atter here how determinacy is ecthat singular reference, as defined, conditions it confirms it otivates a semantic account ofr. This is made possible onlysubstitution of a description fornderstood in the radical senseed the value of bound variables inoccurring is relative goes far beyond-standard semantic approach. pragmaticallysingular verleynot necessarilynecessarily inner relation to objects andsingular referring singular referring phenomenological cases of singular referring sentences withoutuage. It is a bad argumentwhat is all abouts mortal" while presupposing the existence and uniqueness of the teacher of Plato and to him. The

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aential and uniqueness clauses and wx) [(... (Nec ...In our example it would state that the unique individual who happens to be teaching Plato in the context is necessarily identical with himself. This it is specifically located in theget that the self-identity of the unique teacher of Plato in the context entity are not involved hereoes so without imposing onthat is sitions have the property ofequire that uptake be secured. For instance, imust   and the speaker's presuppositions must be a common knowledge between speaker and hearer. Anotherof   (John   says that

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        4) The hearer recognizes what is M-intended by John
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