

## FROM A LINGUISTIC POINT OF VIEW: RUSSELL ON WORDS

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Before we can understand language, we must strip it of its mystical and awe-inspiring attributes. (*IMT*<sub>2</sub>, p. 23)

It might seem that the most natural starting-place for any discussion of language is with *words*, but it is also the area that is most naturally overlooked by philosophers and linguists in their search for “meaning”, “logical form”, “correspondence” or “basic constituent”—the stocks-in-trade of logico-linguistic analysis. On one level, of course, we instinctively understand what a word is, or can recognize one without necessarily being able to define it. Dictionary definitions are notoriously imperfect in their descriptions, unable to account for nuances of meaning and the vast range of pragmatic meanings that can be drawn upon. Locative terms such as “in”, for instance, which one might think of as semantic primitives, are extremely difficult to define; indeed, one linguist has suggested over 100 “meanings” of a simple locative term.<sup>1</sup> Yet in terms of its form the word is seen as an obvious and readily discernible entity. David Crystal suggests that the word has “universal intuitive recognition by native speakers”,<sup>2</sup> and it is from a such intuition that the whole of analytic philosophy proceeds. Yet as Roy Harris points out,

<sup>1</sup> In the following discussion I am indebted to Eva Dubrowska of the University of Sheffield.

<sup>2</sup> David Crystal, *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics* (London: Longmans, 1991), p. 379.

there are many languages in the world that have no terms corresponding to "word".<sup>3</sup> Languages such as the Mexican Cora, for instance, conjoin complex morphemic structures into pragmatically inferred sentences, for example *u h ki ta pu'u*—"the dog's tail is chopped short". In the Western metalinguistic tradition, however, the common-sense, or intuitive, apprehension of the word is taken as axiomatic, and all the subsequent analyses and considerations of the topics listed above develop from it. There is no generic distinction made beyond that of simple *recognition* that phonological and orthographic words—that is, words in speech and words in writing—have different functions. There is no obvious recognition of the role of the *lexeme*, the underlying factor of a set of forms of words, although Russell often speaks as if it is precisely the lexeme that is the fundamental unit, being essentially an attempt to reduce the ambiguity of the term "word". In the history of Western philosophy it is essentially the word that is taken as the basic unit of meaning and analysis, and Russell continues in this tradition.

It is not just any word, however, that is the carrier of meaning. In *The Principles of Mathematics* Russell suggested that "every word occurring in a sentence must have *some* meaning" (p. 42) and made extravagant claims about their relation to the world and to the mind (which he later admitted were "mistaken" [*PM* I: xii]). In his work following the *Principles*, however, he was pulled in two directions regarding his conception of words. In the first instance he was forced to see words as contributing to the meaning of the sentences in which they occur, so his linguistic theory becomes lexico-grammatical. In the second place he began to consider the notion of linguistic particulars; that is, elements which are somehow primitive by virtue of their ostensive ontology, and was thus naturally drawn to considerations of nominals and adjectives. Although it was rarely overtly expressed before the work of the Oxford philosophers in the 1940s and 1950s, philosophers implicitly meant by "word", "nominal", with some adjectives (particularly colour terms) also occasionally qualifying. Adverbs, for instance, and their syntactic extensions, adjuncts, do not figure at all in most philosophical logic before Donald Davidson attempted to find a suitable place for them in analysis.<sup>4</sup> It is

true that Russell and Wittgenstein drew a distinction between "logical words" and what might be called "content words", and Russell, even in the *Principles*, discusses verbs and adjectives and later indexicals, but the overarching, "default" carriers of *meaning* for both philosophers are nominals. The story of Russell's conception of words from the early years of the century to his last philosophical works such as *Human Knowledge* (1948) is one of knowledge and acceptance of the various grammatical and semantic roles of words; to the reduction of such roles in the setting forth of his logicist agenda; to the admission of the logical and psychological functions of words; and finally to the retreat from language-in-use.

That the word is seen as a recognizable, separable unit is of great importance in Russell's work, for it leads to two crucial developments. First, the word can be isolated and stripped to its essential form; second, it reflects a view of the world which in turn contains things which can be isolated and reduced. Thus Ockham's razor can be used on both words and the world. Russell implicitly concurs with Bloomfield's famous definition of the word as the "minimum of free form".<sup>5</sup> In a review of Dewey's *Logic: the Theory of Inquiry* in 1939 he states that words are "discrete and separable occurrences; if the world had as much unity as some philosophers contend, it would be impossible to use words to describe it" (*Papers* 10: 149). Although this comment is made some 35 years after the publication of the *Principles* it represents an attack on holistic, Hegelian philosophies, with their insistence upon "unity". Russell's philosophical reputation was established by a sustained refutation of such doctrines in the early years of the century. As Skorupski says of the early 1900s, the *fin de siècle* philosophical mission of "dissolving the world into experience and infusing it with meaning" came to be seen as "bogus, feeble, an unclean mixing of categories".<sup>6</sup> Replacing this muddled unity were "clarity, sharpness, distinction". For such qualities of analysis to emerge, the word would have to be purged of mysticism, over-reliance on co-text, its relation to "invisible" (or unanalysable) aspects of the mind, and connotation. The linguistics that Russell was to forge in the early part of the century, and which formed the basis of

<sup>3</sup> Roy Harris, *The Language Connection* (Bristol: Thoemmes P., 1996), p. 63.

<sup>4</sup> See in particular his *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford U. P., 1984).

<sup>5</sup> L. Bloomfield, *Language* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1933), p. 178.

<sup>6</sup> J. Skorupski, *English-Language Philosophy 1750–1945* (Oxford: Oxford U. P., 1993) p. 129.

analytical philosophy, was harsh indeed. Instead of a shifting, unfathomable unity of words, connotations, psychological states, concepts and "things", the Russellian world contained just words and things, the words being possessed, at times, of the same properties as the things. Both were separable, discrete and graspable. Russell's break with the words' attendants did not produce an anti-linguistics, only a different kind of linguistics. That it was not anti-linguistic can be seen by its influence on contemporary linguistic theory. Bloomfield, for instance, refers to the definite article in a manner of which Russell would have approved: "The class-meaning of definite determiners is *identified* specimens" (p. 203). It is true that the influence of behaviourism is evident here also, but the notion of class-inclusion is central to Russell's philosophy. Bloomfield has implicitly accepted Russell's restriction of the definite article to its denotational aspect.<sup>7</sup>

Although Russell rejected some of the behaviourists' tenets regarding language, notably their ignorance of the role of images, it is clear that the behaviourist conception of languages coincides with Russell's in terms of its ontology and in terms of how it should be analysed. When the word is recognized as a discrete entity, linked to a world of discrete entities, then each can be objectified. Even though Russell always admitted that language was a social phenomenon (even if "meaning" is seen as somehow private), the meaning of a word was often seen as something objective, not something arbitrary and conventional in the Saussurean sense. In an article entitled "The Relevance of Psychology to Logic" he states that when a child comes to know a word, "The meaning of a word is an objective fact, which he discovers just as he discovers the taste of sugar" (*Papers* 10: 363). Between 1918 and 1940 Russell explicitly considers the problem of "meaning". For him it is primarily a psychological issue, yet is based on an implicit linguistic theory. It is quite extraordinary how language comes to be primarily an issue of "meaning" and then subsumed within the discipline of psychology. On more than one occasion Russell expresses views such as the following:

<sup>7</sup> This is in contrast to the "generic" meaning of the article, which does not pick out a specific item—e.g., "The tiger is a fierce animal."

Logicians, as far as I know, have done very little towards explaining the nature of the relation called "meaning", nor are they to blame in this, since the problem is essentially one for psychology.<sup>8</sup>

Written in 1919, soon after his admission that he had not hitherto considered "meaning" to be of any importance, this and other similar statements show the difficulty semantics had in establishing itself as a discipline in the early part of the twentieth century. For the nineteenth-century philologists, meaning was a matter of etymology; semantics was still viewed as something of an upstart, and Saussure's semiology had not yet made its impact. The great "gap" in linguistic theory was in the theory of meaning, and even as late as 1919 Russell could only turn to psychological models of meaning, such as Watson's behaviourism and Bühler's *Gestalt*.

Yet in the early part of the century a theory of meaning which drew on both philosophy and linguistics was being presented by an important but often overlooked figure, Lady Welby. Russell himself admitted that when he came to read her works, such as *What Is Meaning?* (1903) and *Significs and Language* (1911), he did not take them seriously. Russell states that he "imagined that logic could be pursued by taking it for granted that symbols were always, so to speak, transparent, and in no way distorted the objects they were supposed to 'mean'."<sup>9</sup> Welby had written in 1903, however:

There is nothing more curious than the prevalence of the myth of the "plain" meaning which all can read at all times and in all places. Probably the only type of this which exists out of the sphere of mathematical formula is that of the gesture indicating hunger....<sup>10</sup>

Russell came to learn that such "plain" meaning was an illusion, but he held fast throughout his philosophical career to the doctrine that analysis can only proceed when as much as possible is pared away to reveal the base meaning of a term. It is the philosopher's duty to control meaning in this way, and not to admit interpretative anarchy. It must be remem-

<sup>8</sup> "On Propositions: What They Are and How They Mean", *Papers* 8: 282.

<sup>9</sup> Russell, "The Meaning of Meaning" (1926), *Papers* 9: 138.

<sup>10</sup> Victoria, Lady Welby, *What is Meaning? Studies in the Development of Significs* (London: Macmillan, 1903), p. 143.

bered, however, that Russell's paring away of superfluous meaning or other aspects of communication is, in the first instance, task-specific in that it is designed to lead to a workable ontology and a perspicuous metalanguage. More often than not, Russell is concerned not so much to narrow down the meaning of a term, but its denotation. He does this, particularly in his most austere phase from 1905 to 1913 (roughly from "On Denoting" to *Principia Mathematica*), by rejecting the distinction between the two terms: meaning *becomes* denotation. Though both Russell and Frege employed Ockham's razor in the development of their logicist programmes, the idea of the precision of mathematical language being extended beyond the discourse of mathematics was not new. What was new was the reduction of that mathematical language itself, in tandem with the language used to speak about it. In 1831 de Morgan had written:

Whenever any idea is constantly recurring, the best thing which can be done for the perfection of language, and consequent advancement of knowledge, is to shorten as much as possible the sign which is used to stand for that idea. All that we have accomplished hitherto has been owing to the short and expressive language which we have used to represent numbers, and the operations which are performed upon them. (De Morgan, quoted in Welby, p. 14)

But for Russell the operation was no mere analogy, but his fundamental premiss. What kind of "sign", then, is the word?

Throughout the years 1918–48 Russell consistently considered the word as a class of movements. In "On Propositions: What They Are and How They Mean" (1919) he states that a word is a "class of closely similar noises produced by breath" with the addition of the as yet undefined quality of "meaning" (*Papers* 8: 282). In 1940 he states:

The spoken word "dog" is not a single entity: it is a class of similar movements of the tongue, throat, and larynx. Just as jumping is one class of bodily movements, and walking another, so the uttered word "dog" is a third class of bodily movements. (*IMT*<sub>2</sub>, p. 24)

The only discernible difference in the two positions is the influence of the later Wittgenstein in the latter quotation. A page later, Russell adds the comment that the word is "a family" (p. 25). He modifies his position on "vagueness" in the same discussion. In his 1923 paper, "On

Vagueness", Russell states that only representations are vague, things being "what they are" (*Papers* 9: 148). In the chapter entitled "What Is a Word?" in *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth*, he states that "... dogs are a family, and there are doubtful intermediate cases, just as, in evolution, there must have been between dogs and wolves" (p. 25). Russell is keeping words and the world in tandem here, in contrast to his earlier view that the world was "as it is" and that words are essentially vague.

By 1926, under the influence of Ogden and Richards and of the behaviourists, Russell made the following statements about words:

- (i) Words are social.
- (ii) Words are bodily movements.
- (iii) Words are means of producing effects on others.
- (iv) Words, like other bodily movements, are caused by stimuli.
- (v) It is not of the essence of words to express "ideas".
- (vi) The distinction between the emotional and the logical use of words is illusory. (From "The Meaning of Meaning", *Papers* 9: 139–40)

Taken together, these statements constitute a theory of language which emphasizes the physical, social and denotational aspects of words. A year later, in *An Outline of Philosophy* (1927), still under the sway of behaviourism, Russell began to reflect more on the consequences of a focus on words and meaning in philosophy. The study of language at this stage is for Russell the study of word-meaning, and the study of word-meaning is a matter of psychology. But it is not clear what claims Russell is making for the study of language:

Often when philosophers intended to be considering the objects meant by words they were in fact considering only the words, and when they were considering words they made the mistake of supposing, more or less unconsciously, that a word is a single entity.... The failure to consider language explicitly has been a cause of much that was bad in traditional philosophy.<sup>11</sup>

One might wonder what school of philosophy Russell is attacking here. The most natural contender would be idealism, with its emphasis on wholeness and the interconnectedness of elements. Yet there seem to be two points of view being put forward: the first that one must not get the

<sup>11</sup> Russell, *An Outline of Philosophy* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1927), p. 46.

word and the thing muddled up; the second that the focus on the word *rather* than the thing seems to be the right method of analysis. This would make Russell, in 1927, a philosopher more akin to the later Wittgenstein than at any time of his life, which some may find extraordinary; although Russell adopted a Wittgensteinian view of logic, viz. that it is linguistic, as early as 1919. It is perfectly plausible that Russell is also anticipating later developments—developments with which he was himself wholly unsympathetic. So why is Russell making such extravagant claims for the study of language at this time? It is my view that this insistence upon linguistic issues is not new, only the recognition of their importance. Russell was precisely attempting to clear up the muddle of *words* and *things* in the Theory of Descriptions, as he was earlier in his writing on language as early as 1900, which formed part of *The Principles of Mathematics*. But the focus on the study of language is not to be undertaken for its own sake: to clear up the tangle of words and things by focusing on the meanings of words, then, is to make the way clear for the analysis of things themselves.

Concerning the ontology of words, Russell generally resisted the emphasis on conventional and shared meanings, despite his acknowledgement of the social nature of language. Although word-meaning is conventional within “great limitations”, the ontology of language is something more “natural” (*AMi*, pp. 189–90). In *The Analysis of Mind* he also states that “the basis of language is not conventional, either from the point of view of the individual or from that of the community” (p. 189). Further, he states that: “The association of words with their meanings must have grown up by some natural process” (p. 190). Russell’s naturalism is never fully developed, and it is not clear what he means by “natural process”. It cannot be, however, that the origins of words are due to some Adamic or Platonic “name-giver” who does so in an arbitrary manner. Leibniz speculated that names were attributed (by Adam) through the analogy of the sound of the name and the mental impression of the thing in question, in this case animals. Locke, on the other hand, suggests that the naming process is entirely arbitrary. That Russell is a surrogationalist—believing that words in their primitive uses are substitutes for things—is evident. The question is whether the substituted elements are arbitrary or natural in their origin—an issue that goes back at least as far as Plato’s *Cratylus*. The “natural process” of which he speaks is essentially that of the establishment of some primitive bond

between word and thing. That the process is natural does not imply that the name itself has some natural connection with the thing; rather it suggests the development of habit and bodily function which would bond one class of bodily movements—the utterance of the word—with a class of entities. The association is most obviously established through ostensive definition, although this still begs the question as to what particular class of bodily movements is applicable to what class of entities and for what reason. Russell never goes as far as to say that the word is analogous to some mental representation, but the way he conceives of the ontology of words can be inferred by his methods of analysis on certain classes of them. In his largely behaviourist account in *The Analysis of Mind*, Russell distinguishes between two kinds of *reception* of words used demonstratively and in narrative. In the first case the word is intended to lead to “sensations”; in the second, to “images”. Russell thought the behaviourists wrong to ignore the place of images in their analyses, but it is also clear here that he considers them to be attached only to non-primitive discourse—to language not used ostensively. Primitive meaning is both ostensive and bivalent—qualities extended even to proper names. Curiously, the behaviourist account of language—or at least the modified Russellian form of it—provides us with a link to the later Wittgenstein. Russell was never, as some commentators have assumed, blind to context or to use with regard to language, and the following quotation nicely interprets the work of the behaviourists and anticipates the later Wittgenstein:

Understanding words does not consist in knowing their dictionary definitions, or in being able to specify the objects to which they are appropriate. Such understanding as this may belong to lexicographers and students, but not to ordinary mortals in ordinary life. Understanding language is more like understanding cricket: it is a matter of habits, acquired in oneself and rightly presumed in others. To say that a word has a meaning is not to say that those who use the word correctly have ever thought out what the meaning is: the use of the word comes first, and the meaning is to be distilled out of it by observation and analysis. (*AMi*, p. 197)

Language, then, is a social habit whose users know *of*; but do not necessarily know *about*, the words they use. As with other habits, it can therefore be observed in the relevant environment and subjected to analysis. The analyst, however, proceeds to “distil” a single meaning which is the

essence of a particular word. As demonstrated by his Theory of Descriptions, Russell's analysis proceeds further to eliminate those "illegal" uses; that is, those uses which imply something that is not necessarily the case, again distilled from a single, "default" meaning of a word.

Nevertheless, in his later works, particularly *Human Knowledge*, Russell demonstrates a view of language in some ways sharply at odds with his work in the earlier part of the century. In the early 1900s Russell needed a metalanguage fit for the description of mathematical processes: language had to be tamed and sharpened in order for the truths of mathematics to be shown. In *Human Knowledge*, however, we see not only the influence of Wittgenstein on his conception of logic but also Russell's "retreat from Pythagoras"—the acceptance that mathematics is trivial. Language is seen as increasingly autonomous, and not so much the cause of all error. Rather, the fault lies with the very mathematical systems whose impregnability he had spent so long in attempting to show. In his later works, particularly "Is Mathematics Purely Linguistic?" (1950), mathematics is seen through somewhat despairing eyes. In studying language, he says in *Human Knowledge*, the philosopher "must not be seduced by the siren songs of mathematics" (p. 77). The problem, it seems, is the problem of meaning. Russell had admitted that when he began philosophy "meaning" was not considered. Similarly, semantics, or linguistic analysis of the relation of words to concepts and things, was, even to Ogden and Richards in 1923, something of a novelty. In *Human Knowledge*, Russell admits to some autonomy of language:

Language, once evolved, acquires a kind of autonomy: we can know, especially in mathematics, that a sentence asserts something true, although what it asserts is too complex to be apprehended even by the best minds. (P. 74)

However, this autonomy is not complete, and Russell is reluctant to give up his earlier position lightly. In an extraordinary passage he demonstrates his uneasiness with both his own earlier work and contemporary, i.e. Wittgensteinian, analyses:

Language ... though a useful and even indispensable tool, is a dangerous one, since it begins by suggesting a definiteness, discreteness, and quasi-permanence in objects which physics seems to show that they do not possess. The philosopher, therefore, is faced with the task of using language to undo the false

beliefs that it suggests. Some philosophers, who shrink from the problems and uncertainties and complications involved in such a task, prefer to treat language as autonomous, and try to forget that it is intended to have a relation to fact and to facilitate dealings with the environment. Up to a point, such a treatment has great advantages: logic and mathematics would not have prospered as they have done if logicians and mathematicians had continually remembered that symbols should mean something. (*HK*, p. 76)

Though language *is* autonomous in that it has its own system of rules, constraints and conventions (as Russell had earlier admitted), it is the task of the philosopher to constantly remind us of its crucial relation with the world around us. The last sentence is an ironic commentary on Russell's own work, of course, for the "prospering" of logic and mathematics was largely due to his work; yet his development can be seen as one of increasing moves towards the semantic interpretation of logic. The propositional function, which Russell developed following the discovery of the "class" paradox during the writing of *The Principles of Mathematics* (1903), is essentially a formula for checking language against the world. Instead of classes of things which may or may not exist, we have an "empty" proposition which is held up to the world for confirmation or refutation. Invariably a nominal, the constant replacing the missing element in the function gains meaning only through its contact in a situation which will show the expression to be either true or false. Thus, typically, "I met a man" becomes "I met  $x$  and  $x$  is human' is not always false" and so on. These nominals fit in easily with the idea of a variable in the propositional function; proper names, on the other hand, pose a quite different problem.

As with his work on definite descriptions there is an enormous amount of scholarship devoted to Russell's theory of proper names, for it is partly embedded in the Theory of Descriptions. They are in some ways the archetypal language element for Russell, unencumbered by semantic issues: for Russell, a proper name is "destitute of meaning".<sup>12</sup> And yet in 1921 in *The Analysis of Mind* he states that "In considering what words mean, it is natural to start with proper names" (p. 192). Clearly they *seem* to bear meaning, but ultimately do not. Russell did not adhere to the Fregean doctrine of *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* in relation to

<sup>12</sup> "On the Meaning and Denotation of Phrases", *Papers* 4: 284.

these words.

We should distinguish between the terms “proper name” and “logically proper name”. A logically proper name is a term that is known by acquaintance, and does not pick up any accompanying descriptions. Russell at various times thought that the word “this” was not only a proper name, but also a logically proper name in relation to sense-data. When one utters the word “this” (in the relevant context, as a “pure” demonstrative), one does so, logically, without any necessary description (though one can be supplied *à posteriori*). The word is uttered, then, in a purely ostensive manner: Russell does not distinguish between pointing and naming in his discussions of “this”. The logically proper name, however, is, for the most part, an idealized aspect of language, for most proper names do not function as names for immediate sense-data.

The earliest reference to proper names by Russell is to be found in a paper given to the Cambridge Moral Sciences Club in January 1899, entitled “The Classification of Relations”. In an argument similar to that put forward in *The Principles of Mathematics* (1903) concerning “terms”, he states: “If a term has no meaning, then, as Mr. Bradley says of the practice of giving proper names, it had better be abandoned” (*Papers* 2: 143). Although it is the abandonment of terms with no meaning that is at issue here, the reference to proper names is illuminating. If a term must have meaning and proper names have no such meaning, then proper names cannot be terms and cannot function legitimately in propositions. Natural language is not equipped to provide us with logically proper names, but Russell at times thought that the proper names of ordinary language could, in some instances, mimic the function of their abstract logical counterparts. According to Frege, proper names have both a “sense” (*Sinn*) and a “reference” (*Bedeutung*)—or to use Russell’s translations, “meaning” and “denotation” (occasionally “indication”). The names “George Eliot” and “Mary Ann Evans”, for example, have different senses, yet pick out the same referent. By using the term “Mary Ann Evans” one picks out a different sense, or perspective on, the object or person concerned. The difficulty with this position is that it rides roughshod over the distinctions between different kinds of proper names—distinctions that Russell was aware of. Quite early on in his philosophical work, Russell noted three types of proper name:

(i) The logically proper name. This occurs rarely in natural language,

and is often not what philologists would know as a “proper name” (e.g. “this”). It does not pick up any associated description.

- (ii) The ordinary proper name. The proper name sometimes seems like its logical counterpart. Many proper names as commonly used necessarily pick up descriptions. In one sense what Russell increasingly saw as unlikely—a proper name with no accompanying description—Saul Kripke came to see as the true character of the proper name.<sup>13</sup>
- (iii) Proper names derived from descriptions. In the *Principles* Russell states that “... only such proper names as are derived from concepts by means of *the* can be said to have meaning” (p. 502).

It is clear that the proper names of (iii) are derived from descriptions which are in turn derived from particular concepts. Far from being the simple, demonstrative bearers of meaning, these proper names are twice removed from any lexical sense. The name, at most, is a bundle of associated descriptions which may or may not have concepts attached to them and in turn may or may not be terms in legitimate propositions. That is, because they are essentially descriptions, they can be subject to analysis according to the Theory of Descriptions. For example, if I now invent a name, Dr. Derek Biscuit, then that name should have accompanying descriptions. If I then put it into a proposition I can translate the name into one or more of those descriptions and proceed according to the theory. Thus, “Dr. Derek Biscuit is bald” translates into the only possible genuine description:

“The entity made up in this paper by Keith Green, is bald.”

To proceed according to the theory of descriptions is to eliminate the illegal pseudo-constituent, “the entity made up in this paper by Keith Green”. The “meaning” in the Russellian sense, of a proper name, is quite different from the Fregean sense. The proper name does not “mean” its set of associated descriptions: it is its set of descriptions by another name.

It seems also that, theoretically, proper names can be substituted for

<sup>13</sup> Kripke, “Identity and Necessity” (1971), in S. Schwarz, ed., *Naming, Necessity and Natural Kinds* (London and Ithaca: Cornell U. P., 1977), pp. 66–101.

logically proper names. In 1913 Russell felt that this was the case, but by 1948 his view has been modified several times. In 1913 he states:

There is thus at any given moment a certain assemblage of objects to which I could, if I chose, give proper names; these are the objects of my "awareness", the objects "before my mind" or the objects that are within my present "experience". (*TK*, pp. 7–8)

This is a doctrine which Russell wished to hold onto for much of his philosophical career, but which was increasingly modified in the light of his observations concerning ordinary language. Ideally the proper name should function in this way, but invariably it does not. When it does not, it can be seen as a "truncated" description. In "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism" he writes:

Proper Names = words for particulars. Definition.

I have put this down although, as far as common language goes, it is obviously false. It is true that if you try to think how you are to talk about particulars, you will see that you cannot even talk about a particular particular except by means of a description. (*Papers* 8: 178)

Russell appears to be trying to have it both ways. On the one hand he wants to make a distinction between proper names in some logical sense and proper names in ordinary language. However, he ends up talking not about such names in the object language, but in the metalanguage: *talking about* a particular and *naming* a particular are different things. Russell is similarly pulled in two different directions. One direction is that of seeing proper names as primitive, essential names for particulars; the other is that of seeing proper names as semantically empty, but carrying the baggage of descriptive phrases. In *The Analysis of Mind* he states:

In language there is no direct way of designating one of the ultimate brief existents that go to make up the collections we call things or persons.

(P. 193)

He goes on to say that if language had been invented by scientists the proper names might be applied to particulars. Recognizing that this is

not the case, Russell is content to see proper names in terms of how they function in everyday discourse.

By 1940 Russell had abolished the idea of particulars and extended the concept of "name" in order to find a middle way between the two diverging paths. Instead of positing a distinction between proper and common names, or nouns, Russell simply defines certain words as "universals". These universals are defined syntactically and called "names". This is a most curious move. By ridding his world of particulars and proper names, he develops a syntactic view of names and extends the range of universals. A proper name, it will be remembered, can only occur "as the subject that the proposition or some subordinate proposition is about, and not what is said about the subject" (*PoM*, p. 43). A "name", however, is "any word that can occur in any species of atomic sentence" (*IMT*<sub>2</sub>, p. 95). Although Russell states that he does not wish to abolish names entirely, but extend our notion of them, this move does seem to temporarily suspend the proper name, as it is always linked with a particular. I think Russell makes this move for two reasons, both of which were always implicit in his writing up to the *Inquiry* (1940). He was earlier content to say that, ideally, proper names should function in the manner  $x$ , but invariably functioned in the manner  $y$ . But this was no accident of individual usage. Rather it was the result of a clash between Russell's logic and his epistemology. In the *Inquiry*, he seems to have, for the moment, found a way to reconcile the two positions within a linguistic framework. Here he admits that there are two separate questions, one logical, one epistemological. These questions, concerning the function of proper names, are initially further complicated by an emphasis on the linguistic, particularly the syntactical, aspects of names.

For the logician, of course, names are unimportant in the sense that "no proposition of logic can contain any actual name" (*IMT*<sub>2</sub>, p. 97). On the other hand, the epistemologist needs to know what "things" can be legitimately called "names". Rather than insisting that certain words are proper names and others not, Russell extends the concept of "name" both syntactically and semantically. In a remarkable paragraph, Russell elucidates:

I wish to suggest that "this is red" is not a subject–predicate proposition, but is of the form "redness is here"; that "red" is a name, not a predicate; and that

what would commonly be called a "thing" is nothing but a bundle of coexisting qualities such as redness, hardness, etc. (*Ibid.*)

Proper names are reduced to universals as "names", and "names" are used to refer to "some continuous portion of space-time". After nearly 50 years, Russell returns to attack the logic of subject-predicate relations and shows us once again that the "real" form of an utterance is quite different from its apparent form.

But by 1948 Russell had changed his mind once more. The tension between the logical and empirical versions of proper names became increasingly evident, despite his attempts in 1940. In *Human Knowledge* he rejects the physical and logical versions, declaring:

I conclude that names are to be applied to what is experienced and that what is experienced does not have, essentially and necessarily, any such spatio-temporal uniqueness as belongs to a space-time region in physics. (P. 96)

Although Russell further declared that logic has "no occasion for names", he still wished to explore what might be the nearest thing to the ever-haunting "logically proper name". Rather than being applied to a thing with which we are acquainted, the theory of proper names is now seen in terms of a "minimum vocabulary". Ultimately, they are "words for qualities and complexes of compresent qualities" (p. 98). Proper names had become adjectival.

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