Donnellan's misdescriptions and loose talk

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> Literal talk, metaphorical talk and loose talk are different not in kind, but in degree of looseness.
>
> [Sperber and Wilson 1986: 153]

Keith Donnellan wrote his paper on definite descriptions in 1966 at Cornell University, an environment where nearly everybody was discussing Wittgenstein's ideas of meaning as use. However, his idea of different uses of definite descriptions became one of the fundamental tenets against descriptivism, which was considered one of the main legacies of the Frege–Russell–Wittgenstein view; and I wonder whether a more Wittgensteinian interpretation of Donnellan's work is possible. Donnellan distinguishes *attributive uses* of definite descriptions (using "the *F*" we talk of the individual object, whatever it is, that uniquely fits the description) and *referential uses* (using "the *F*" we refer to an individual object that we have in mind through direct access, even if the individual does not properly fit the description). In this chapter I will discuss a well-known example, proposed by Leonard Linsky (1963) and analyzed by Donnellan, which can be summarized as follows:

> If, attending a scene with a man and a woman (whom I don't know is a spinster), I say "her husband is kind to her" intending to refer to the individual who is actually her lover, I refer to him and I say something true, revealing a kind of ambiguity that pertains neither to syntax nor to semantics.[1]

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7.1 Problems with Kripke's account of referential misdescriptions

Kripke (1977) answers Donnellan's paper by claiming (i) that speaking of "pragmatic ambiguity" is a kind of nonsense, and only a semantic ambiguity between attributive and referential uses might invalidate Russell's quantificational treatment—but there is no semantic ambiguity of the expression "the"; and that, (ii) although it is apparent that we may *understand* a misdescription (like "her husband" said to refer to a lover), we do not *say* anything true; we rather follow something analogous to Grice's distinction between what is said and what is implicated, in a "two-stage" view: we *say* something false, and thereby we *implicate* something true of the individual referred to. Therefore also the so-called referential use finds a proper place inside the standard quantificational Russellian analysis and can be explained through the difference between semantic reference and speaker reference. Kripke's idea started what has been called a "unificationist" approach, in contrast to the "ambiguity" approach to definite description later developed by Michael Devitt.[2]

In Kripke's view, therefore, utterances with misdescriptions become a simple case of implicature from the apparent falsity of *what is said* to *what the speaker intends to refer to*. Let us call this "the standard view" of definite misdescriptions, a view that has been accepted by many.[3] Even Devitt (2004), the main critic of Kripke's "Russellian" solution, rejects the possibility of making a true claim with an utterance that contains a referential misdescription and justifies the pragmatic understanding of such an utterance in the standard way. Tyler Burge (2009: 290) expresses an analogous claim with the thesis that a context-bound singular representation has a referent only if it is guided by an "ability general representation that is in fact veridical of the referent."[4]

However, although Kripke's solution is elegant and clear, it clashes with a fundamental idea put forward by Donnellan (1966: 257):

(DISC) When a speaker uses a definite description referentially he may have *stated* something true or false even if nothing fits the description. (Donnellan 1966: 26, my italics)

I will call this idea "Donnellan's intentional strong claim" (DISC) because—contrary to Kripke's view—it claims that, in intending to use a description to refer to an individual, the speaker *states* something true even if the description does not fit the referent literally. However, after Kripke's solution, to speak of a truth *stated* by a misdescription becomes a problem for direct reference theorists.[5] There is, however, a strong and a weak interpretation of DISC: a strong way is that what is said—the semantic content—is either true or false; a weak interpretation, which might be taken by many who share Kripke's view, is to claim that what is said goes beyond the semantic content—and we may then speak of a proposition asserted as true or false.

Presenting something similar to Neale's Gödelian completion (see n. 4 here), Soames gives what can be interpreted as a possible variant of DISC: the literal interpretation of a misdescription as "the man drinking champagne is a famous philosopher" (as the person in question is drinking mineral water) entails an enriched proposition as (1) [the x: x is a man & . . . & $x = m$] x is a famous philosopher. But (1) entails (2) "m is a famous philosopher," and this last proposition is true (provided that m is a famous philosopher). Soames therefore concludes that we may say something true although our assertion is literally false, and "the fact that the speaker has, strictly speaking, asserted one or more falsehoods will matter less than his having asserted an important truth" (Soames 2005: 23). Soames succeeds in *deriving* a singular true proposition from a general proposition, a derivation that represented the most difficult challenge posed to the unificationists by Devitt. However, this solution has two disadvantages. First, it relies basically

on the idea of enrichment, central to an "explicit approach" that has too many shortcomings (see Neale 2004, §7) and, second, it asks us to accept a mysterious way in which the "intended denotation" of a misdescription enters the picture: there is no clue as to how we get the intended *m*, but rather a postulation. In the next sections, keeping the "strong view" of DISC, I will try to answer this second aspect: What constraints and what strategies are permitted to speakers and hearers if they are to give and to get the intended denotation?

Another interesting discussion of Donnellan's point is offered by Wettstein (2012). According to him, Donnellan's (1966) paper has two main theses: (i) the distinction between referential and attributive use has semantic significance; (ii) a description can refer even when it fails to apply to the referent in virtue of the description's literal meaning. While he holds (i), distancing himself from Kripke, Wettstein accepts Kripke's criticism on the second point and accepts his pragmatic solution, casting doubts upon the correctness of DISC.

Besides the general contrast with DISC, Kripke's solution to the treatment of misdescriptions is not exempt from problems. First—as Ludlow and Neale (2006: 300), who basically defend the standard "unificationist" view, admit—the typical derivation using Grice's schema is at most "an *ex post facto* justification" and does not provide an *explanation* of how or why a hearer infers what the speaker intends to communicate. Actually, going back to our example, it seems that a speaker ignorant of the marital status of the lady has *no intention* to make an implicature by violating the maxim of quality; and people attending the scene and knowing the truth would probably realize that it was just a mistake; no intended implicature was associated to it. Yet the conversation, as in many cases of misdescriptions, proceeds without great difficulties, as if the speaker had stated something true (analogously to the way a presupposition, although kown to be false, is accomodated for the sake of the conversation).[6]

Second, some contextualists have taken an intermediary position between Devitt's ambiguity view and the standard pragmatic view developed after Kripke. According to them, definite descriptions have a unitary meaning and behave differently depending on the context of utterance (see e.g. Recanati 1993 and Bezuidenhout 1997). The decision as to which use (referential of attributive) will be relevant is conveyed through primary pragmatic processes that work at the level of intuitive truth conditions. Third, while in the 1970s the concept of "what is said" was considered unproblematic, at the turn of the century this very concept has been the subject of intense debate among several competing theories (see for instance Penco and Domaneschi 2013); the problem therefore requires a restatement of the notion of *what is said* by an utterance containing a referential misdescription. There is still space to vindicate Donnellan's strong claim.

7.2 A first defence of Donnellan's strong claim: Kinds of strong inertness thesis

I do not intend to discuss here the possible shortcomings of the contextualist solution,[7] but rather to point out the convergence between a "radical" development of François Recanati's ideas and a suggestion made by Joseph Almog, both of which aim at a vindication of Donnellan's strong claim.

Recanati (2013b) develops his view of definite descriptions inside the theory of mental files, where mental files are intermediary entities between conceptual representations and the world: mental files may contain conceptual representations (descriptions) and other kinds of

representations, but their relation to objects is direct. Recanati follows Martí's suggestion as to what defines a strong referential use of a description:

> If a definite description can be used as a device of direct reference . . . the attributes associated with it should not play a role in the determination of reference. Therefore, if a definite description *the F* can be used referentially, in the strong sense, it must be possible to use it to refer to an object independently of whether that object satisfies the attributes associated with *the F*. (Martí 2008: 49)

In this way it is possible to overcome the standard solution about misdescriptions, avoiding at the same time solutions that use the idea of a reference-fixing description. According to Recanati and Martí,

> The anti-descriptivist thrust of early theories of direct reference such as Donnellan's is lost if we say that the singular predicate encoded by a referentially used description or an indexical "fixes the reference" of the expression. Two-dimensional Descriptivism is still Descriptivism. The mental file account preserves the original Millian inspiration of direct reference theories in giving pride of place to acquaintance relations and downplaying satisfactional factors. (Recanati 2013b: 169).

The linguistic meaning leads us to a mental file, which is relationally linked to the object, and the reference of the expression just is the reference of the mental file.

Not so distant from Recanati's view is Almog's (2004) claim that the referent of a referential description is fixed by a perceptual cognitive link that *precedes* the linguistic means. What counts is the causal–cognitive chain that connects the referent to the mind of the speaker. Once the object is fixed, we may use any means to communicate our intention to refer: a proper name,

an indexical, or a referential description. Referential descriptions will be considered "contextuals"—like indexicals or demonstratives, whose reference depends on the context of utterance.

Almog (2012: 177) wants to extract from Donnellan's writings a foundational theory grounded on the idea that Donnellan's concept of referential use is designed to be "of semantic significance": according to Almog, Donnellan developed a ground zero of semantic reference analogous to Russell's idea of logically proper names, which for Russell were exemplified in natural language by demonstratives. Given these premises, Almog, too, like Recanati, admits ways of using a misdescription to refer, and thinks it possible to refer to the source of our perception "*knowingly* using a false predicate":

> it might well be the case that my audience in the party is convinced that Sir Alfred is a man, and so I will say "the man drinking martini," even though I know he is a female in disguise. The predicative information I use does not fix what I talk about. (This much is already fixed by what I have in mind by the information-chain leading to my use.) I rather use the predicate to help you gather what object I already have in mind. (Almog 2012: 181)[8]

Both Recanati and Almog seem to enclose semantics—or theory of reference—within cognitive psychology. Both make a move toward explaining what unifies the semantic behavior of proper names, indexicals, and definite descriptions. The direct cognitive relation of reference to an item we have in mind (or in a mental file) grounds the semantic relation and—as Almog (2012: 181) puts it—"what is at stake for Donnellan is not so much the morphology of the specific expression used but the underlying cognitive relation between the cognizer and the cognized object." Once we have a direct cognitive link (or, as Donnellan would prefer, a sound historical link), we may

choose any linguistic means to express it and to communicate to others. The result of accepting the idea of stating something true even with a false description could be dubbed, analogously to similar solutions[9] in the discussion of complex demonstratives, *strong inertness thesis* (SIT):

(SIT) the predicate F in "the F is G" appears to be truth conditionally inert and the proposition expressed is true in the context of utterance if the object to which the speakers intend to refer is G.

This move helps propose a unified mechanism underlying many different linguistic processes, but has the disadvantage of giving no specific hints as to the differences among those different linguistic means (proper names, indexicals, and referential uses of descriptions),[10] all of which are supposed to work just as labels. Moreover, it has at least three disadvantages:

(i) We may accept the idea that the use of a referential description is not to *fix* the reference, but to facilitate the hearer's cognitive access to the object the speaker has in mind: the reference is fixed in advance by the direct link between the object and the speaker. This seems to be a good rendering of what is going on in a conversation; but, without further specification, it runs the risk of making "the F" just an elliptical for "the F I have in mind." This step is counterintuitive, as Bach (2007a: 40) has already remarked. We cannot "borrow" the reference directly from the mind of another person: "merely knowing that someone has a certain object in mind in connection with his use of a definite description is not enough to put one in a position to form singular thoughts about that object oneself" (Bach 2007a: 57). For a proper use of a referential description we need not only cognitive access to the object, but also restrictions on the use of the descriptive part, so that we may avoid conflating explicit language use with private sensations;[11] but we have no hint about such restrictions from SIT.

(ii) The solution may also fall under a criticism concerning semantic compositionality (Borg 2000). SIT implies that predicates are treated sometimes as "otiose" and sometimes as meaningful in our semantic theory, and this different treatment of the rules for semantic interpretation is not a welcome result unless we find a specific way of justifying it.

(iii) Even if we overcome this worry, a pragmatic worry blocks this solution. A defense of SIT should claim that, in utterances containing a referential misdescription, we mistake lack of truth for pragmatic inappropriateness: we say something that is true, but pragmatically inappropriate. An utterance like "her husband is kind to her" would be true, but would be "pragmatically odd, not because of its semantically expressed content, but because of an implicature it generates," namely the (false) implicature that the person referred to is the lady's husband. However, claiming that would produce inconvenient results, because cancelling the implicature would amount to a contradiction.[12]

It seems therefore that, as an alternative to the Kripkean solution, the advantages of the strong inertness thesis are outweighed by the disadvantages. The point of my chapter will be to find an alternative way to treat misdescriptions, one that avoids the shortcomings of the strong inertness thesis and gives a better rendering of DISC.

7.3 Donnellan's argument against Humpty Dumpty

The common way of presenting Donnellan's thought is the following:

(REF) what is relevant in referential uses is the direct (causal, perceptual, or historical) connection and the intention to refer to that particular individual;

(SIN) what is expressed by an utterance with a referential use of a definite description is a singular proposition and not a quantified one, as in Russell's theory of description.

Both assumptions require specification. Actually, as is not often noted, Donnellan—although the source of inspiration of the idea of direct reference[13]—gives no explicit treatment of referential descriptions as contributing a singular proposition or as behaving just like tags, as proper names do. On the contrary, he seems to give some semantic role to the descriptive content of referential descriptions; this also appears in his paper "Reference, Description and Anaphora," where he claims that, when a speaker uses a description to refer to a person or to a thing, the speaker in question "intends that the truth or falsity shall be a function, *in part*, of the properties of the person or thing" (Donnellan 1978: 136, my italics; all page references to this article are from the version reprinted in Donnellan 2012).

Supporters of the direct referential view would not appreciate this statement; in fact Wettstein (2012: 94) criticizes this characterization as "problematic," almost a deviation from the direct reference stance. But this quotation leads me to think that Donnellan's main worry was perhaps not only the idea of direct reference. If the speaker uses a description taking it as relevant—at least *in part*—for the truth and falsity of the content of his assertions, then truth conditions should be partly linked to the role of the descriptive content the speaker chooses to refer to the individual he has in mind. I wonder what the point of this suggestion in treating misdescriptions could be, and I will try to push this suggestion beyond the use Donnellan made of it in his 1978 paper.

A clarification comes from the sophisticated argument Donnellan made in answering a criticism that would render his theory unacceptable. According to this criticism, referential uses amount to a Humpty Dumpty perspective: given that intentions are what counts, as long as we

have the right intention, we may use any definite description whatsoever to refer to an individual, "regardless of the content of the description."

Donnellan (1968: 210–11) claims that no such disastrous consequences "follow from the position that what a speaker refers to in a referential use of a definite description is determined by his intentions." The point Donnellan wants to stress is that intentions "are *essentially* connected with expectations" (my italics). It is worth quoting an entire passage:

> In the analysis of meaning given by Grice, a speaker means something by an utterance when he has a certain complex kind of intention involving recognition on the part of his audience of his intention. *And what the speaker means is determined by the content of that intention. Whether he can form that intention, however, may depend upon what expectations he has about his audience* and their ability to grasp his intention. It does not follow, then, from this analysis that speakers might, out of the blue, mean anything at all by any utterance. And *the existence of an established practice* may be usually required for speakers to have *the right expectations*. (Donnellan 1968: 209, my italics)

It appears that Donnellan is concerned with two kinds of intentions: a *referential intention* (the intention to refer to the object the speaker has in mind) and a *social intention* (the intention to use a descriptive content fit for the context of utterance). This step seems to be an attempt to lay down felicity or assertibility conditions for using referential descriptions: both intentions should be present in a correct act of assertion containing a referential description. We need, then, to answer some questions:

(i) What are the "right" expectations required by an established practice?

(ii) What happens when we do not have the right expectations?

(iii) Are the right expectations to be intended as part of what is said?

To answer question (i), it seems that the right expectations are what is missing in the strong inertness thesis SIT: right expectations are what gives explicit restrictions to the descriptive content of a definite description. Besides, if we speak of "right" expectations, a normative aspect is at stake: a speaker cannot use *any* descriptive content at will, but is bound to choose what she *should* expect the audience to understand, given some established practices. An established practice depends on the size of the audience: in a conversational exchange among a few friends or in a group of peers, we may find some terminology that would sound awkward if used in a broader context,[14] where we have to rely on a more generalized and established practice—such as that found in dictionaries and encyclopedias.

Question (ii) asks what happens if the speaker has the wrong expectations. We might answer that the utterance is unsuccessful and the intention to refer does not go through but lingers, confined in the privacy of the speaker's mind; even with an individual in mind, the utterance (the use of a particular linguistic expression in order to refer) is a misfire: the act of referring to something through language does not succeed, and the speaker does not succeed in saying anything semantically evaluable. Referring is an act; hence missing some of the normative requirements for its felicity conditions may lead to failure and may require the speaker to find other ways to point out what she intends to refer to.[15]

Question (iii) asks which space is to be given to Donnellan's expectations and established practice in a semantic theory. How do they impinge on the truth-conditional content of what is said? To answer this question I will place DISC in the perspective developed after the recent debates on the boundary between semantics and pragmatics. There is widespread agreement that *what is said* is not simply determined—as Grice seemed to claim—by the literal meaning of the

lexical items (if something of the kind exists), but is heavily determined or constrained by the context of utterance. Speaking of expectations and established practice, Donnellan hinted at conventional agreements implicit in everyday conversation, agreements about the acceptance of using everyday speech loosely or with approximations.

7.4 Donnellan's point on loose talk

Giving the implicit suggestion of making expectations part of what is said, Donnellan's argument against the *reductio ad Humpty Dumpty* of his theory can therefore be considered as a first attempt to give what can be defined as a theory of loose talk. Therefore—contrary to any expectation—Donnellan can be seen as a forerunner of ideas later developed in the environment of contextualist analysis of meaning and reference. Let us consider a first analogy between the idea of loose talk defined in Sperber and Wilson (1986) and Donnellan's treatment of definite descriptions. A central aspect of "loose talk" is how much is assumed without being said. An example will help:

> When I draw you a diagram of how to get to my house, you do not infer that I intend you to travel across white paper, in two dimensions, past landmarks clearly labeled CHURCH and NEWSPAPER SHOP, a distance of 8 inches from door to door. You have to make some assumption about which properties of the representation carry over to the original.
>
> (Sperber and Wilson 1986: 159)

The relevant properties in this case are therefore the turns to take at particular points in the town we are located in, and not, for instance, the exactness of the length of the streets. Analogously, we might assume that the relevant properties used in the referential use of "her

husband" are typical behavioral properties that help pick the salient male in the scene, and there is no expectation of a detailed knowledge of legal marriage documents. According to Sperber and Wilson (1986: 165), the looseness of our way of speaking is typically motivated by the pursuit of relevance: achieving the greatest cognitive effect with the least effort. If the cognitive effect I want to pursue is to make the hearer refer to what I have in mind and I want to achieve the greatest cognitive effect with the least effort (for me and for the interlocutors), I would *not* say something like "the adult male salient in the scene who seems to me, although I don't know it for certain, to be her husband, given the freedom with which he behaves with her, is kind to her." I might, but it would require a lot of cognitive effort not only from me, but also from the hearer, who—bored—might abandon me in the middle of my description. Therefore I would never do it. We do not normally take care to make explicit all the information concerning our limited knowledge of the state of affairs, just as we don't make explicit the level of approximation: we don't say that we don't know exactly how many meters the church is from the newsagent's, just as we don't make explicit that our interlocutor doesn't have to go *over* the piece of paper on which she sees the drawing of a map. Loose talk can be considered a common practice of relaxing descriptive accuracy for the sake of simplicity of expression and relevance.

The basic expectations are therefore expectations of relevance; and looseness, or the relaxation of descriptive accuracy, is motivated by the pursuit of relevance—together with guesswork, given our limited knowledge. I see the lover and I guess from his proximity to the lady and his attitude that he is the husband; using "the husband" to refer to him, I don't use just any description whatsoever, but a description that is *probably* right and that helps to *easily select* the individual I am referring to from the domain of other individuals in the scene.[16]

It would therefore not be incongruous to place Donnellan's view within a more general contextualist framework, where reference is given through some kind of pragmatic strategies.

Approximation or looseness has been widely discussed, in different ways, as requiring broadening, narrowing, transfer, and other kinds of pragmatic processes of modulation that pertain to what we might call, with a terminology taken from relevance theory, the explicature of a definite description. The basic point we agree with is the rejection of the "two-stage" analysis according to which we express the false and, by implicature, we get the right reference. It is reasonable to think that, like metaphors and narrowings, misdescriptions, too, rely on *local* inference processes that contribute to the semantic content.[17] However, it is worth remarking that the kind of modulation required in the case of a referential misdescription should concern not only the *properties* of the object, but also the speaker's *attitude* to his limited knowledge. What I will develop in the next section is the intuitive idea that utterances such as "her husband is kind to her" should normally be explicated as something like "the person the speaker has reason to believe to be her husband is kind to her." In this kind of explication we express the viewpoint of the speaker, which relies on a default agreement given by a shared convention: the speaker rightly expects that his loose description will be accepted without further inquiry, unless inquiry is needed. Everyday linguistic exchange is grounded on the basic habit of accepting inaccurate descriptions for simplicity of communication, and misdescriptions are just an extreme case of *inaccurate* descriptions.[18]

With his examples of misdescriptions, Donnellan therefore implicitly suggests a contrast between loose talk and strict talk:[19] inaccurate referential descriptions express a *normal or typical* condition of linguistic exchange. *Most* of our descriptions in everyday conversation are loose, inaccurate, and approximate; in everyday talk we rarely perform the role of scientists

devoted to nanometric precision. That's why we sometimes say "strictly speaking." "Strictly speaking" is *not* the norm of everyday linguistic exchange. Loose talk is the standard.

But this means that our standard philosophical way of understanding the meaning of a definite description in normal conversation is not correct. Let us take the example of the man who drinks champagne. When saying "the man drinking champagne over there is *F*," we do *not* typically mean, as Kripke (1977) suggested, "Exactly one man over there is drinking champagne" (and he is *F*). On the contrary, we typically mean something whose explicature would be similar to "The salient individual who seems to drink champagne in that corner is *F*," or, if we want, "Exactly one person is reasonably expected to be described as drinking champagne in that corner, and he is *F* (but there might also be other people drinking champagne that I am unaware of)." However, as suggested before, in a normal conversation we will almost never make explicit this kind of recognition of our uncertain knowledge of the situation. In our typical condition of missing or incomplete information we continuously face a trade-off between explicit specification of the limits of our knowledge and beliefs, and the perspicuity and velocity of communication. Assuming that we are not omniscient, most of the time[20] we defer to reasonable and probable expectations about what is presupposed in the context of utterance. I think that Donnellan requires too much in speaking of "right expectations"; we should be content with reasonable and probable expectations, where there is still space for the partial but essential role of descriptive content. Therefore we should shift from kinds of strong inertness theses like those held by Recanati and Almog toward a weak inertness thesis, where this partial and perspectival role of the descriptive content is taken into account. In what follows I will try to show where this step may lead us.

7.5 A weakened inertness thesis and its challenges

By way of deriving a conclusion from the previous paragraph, we may reach a proposal that appears to be fit for DISC from the point of view of a contextualized Donnellan: a *weakened inertness thesis* (WIT), which may described as follows:

(WIT) There are some contexts in which an utterance with a referential description "The F is G" is true if the object referred to is G and not F, but it is reasonable that it might be F.

We should distinguish between "reasonable" contexts—where the speaker has reasonable expectations concerning an established practice—and "unreasonable" contexts—where the speaker misses the expectation of actual linguistic practice, and gives no clue as to what he could possibly refer to through his idiosyncratic description. For instance, let us suppose that, observing the same scene of the interaction between the lady and her lover and intending to refer to the lover, a speaker says "her book is kind to her"—maybe because he has an idiosyncratic belief that the lover might be an intellectual and therefore it would be nice to dub him "the book"; but, given no previous definition or information in the context about this peculiar Humpty Dumpty intention, there is no clue as to what the speaker is referring to. The speaker's referent may be well placed inside the head of the speaker, but the speaker's act of referring misfires and fails to refer in the given context (although we might find other situations in which the utterance might be appropriate).

In this WIT the predicate still has a semantic role, but it does not *strictly* attribute the property to the individual referred to, and thus may fall under the notion of "inertness"; the

semantics of referential descriptions in this case would convert the value of *F* to *reasonably taken to be F*. A similar version of the WIT concerning complex demonstratives has been criticized and discarded by Glanzberg and Siegel (2006); I will try to answer their criticism limiting myself to the case of definite descriptions (but what I have to say might apply to complex demonstratives as well). Let us assume that, contrary to Linsky's assumptions, the lady has a legal husband, and let us take two sentences:

A. "Her husband is kind to her"

B. "The person who is reasonably taken to be her husband is kind to her"

B could be used while pointing to the legal husband or to the lover and, under certain conditions, could be true in both cases. However, if requested to give testimony in court in a case of marriage separation, I could use B to refer to the husband or to the lover, if I may express my uncertain beliefs, but I could not use A to refer to the lover (perhaps on pain of being accused of perjury). The two sentences therefore cannot be considered synonymous.[21]

Is there an answer to this difficulty? Is there a way to preserve a WIT? I think so, and I think the criticism made by Glanzberg and Siegel depends on their use of "reasonable context." What is missing from their analysis is the relevance of contexts of justification to defining the meaning of an expression; in a contextualist epistemology, the justification required of the participants may change the meaning, depending on the context of assessment.[22] The WIT works only in the context of loose talk, where the meaning of the words is defined under a looseness assumption; it should be blocked in the context of scientific or legal analysis, where strict talk is at stake.

The WIT may be taken as a tool in a theory of communication for analyzing conversations. A looseness assumption filters the use of lexicon in context, exploiting the complex inferential relations attached to a lexical item, which can be represented as part of the semantic or

inferential network in which the lexical item is typically inserted (we may think also of what Wittgenstein called the "field of force" of a word).[23] If I say "the man drinking champagne," my description is inaccurate, but not entirely wrong; the man is drinking, and he is drinking from a champagne glass; if I say "her husband" I say something extremely inaccurate, assuming my lack of knowledge regarding the actual legal situation; still, I may have reasons to believe that the person is her husband. We have remarked that in using and understanding language there is a lot of "guesswork." I guess, and I could be right.[24] Why did I guess? Because I rely on common knowledge on how husbands behave, on the surrounding inferences of the lexical item: if x is y's husband, then x behaves with familiarity with y, and so on. *If asked* "Why did you call him 'her husband'?" I might give an answer, perhaps revealing my narrow set of beliefs on human relationships, but still a reasonable answer. The speaker who says "her husband is kind to her" therefore does not necessarily either assume that he knows for certain that the person he has in mind is the husband or intend to implicate that the man is not the husband but the lover; relaxing his descriptive accuracy, he just intends to say that a person who can be reasonably taken to be her husband is kind to her. That's why apparently incorrect characterizations don't block the access to the referent.

We might also push the claim further toward a vision of a justificationist theory of meaning. In fact, as we stated before discussing Donnellan's ideas connected with DISC, if we assume the WIT, then *what is said* by a referential description depends on the grade of looseness required by the context. If the meaning of a definite description is no longer "there is a unique x exactly fitting the description" but "there is a unique x at least loosely fitting the description" or "reasonably taken to be an F," then the truth conditions of a sentence with a referential misdescription are different in strict talk and in loose talk: in strict talk, as often recognized by

philosophers of language, I say something false (he is not a husband) and something true (he is kind) at the same time; in normal, everyday talk, I just state something true under a looseness assumption of the kind of WIT.

If we think that the same expression may assume different meanings depending on different epistemic requirements, we should join the stance taken by those who claim, like Carston (2013), that lexical meaning is underdetermined or depends on occasional situations, or propose a kind of grab-bag theory, as Unnsteinsson (2014) or Allott and Textor (forthcoming). The difference from those theories is that, in this setting, the meaning of an expression is constrained under an epistemological requirement: we have to give a proper role to the unexpressed agreement on the looseness and uncertainty that is acceptable in a certain context, given the level of epistemic requirement in that context.

A WIT might therefore also take into consideration different contexts of justification, where we find different requirements of exactness or looseness; we may express a thesis for everyday conversation and call it the *provisional default thesis* (PRODET):

(PRODET) In the context of everyday conversation an utterance with a referential description "The F is G" is true if the object referred to is G and there is at least a provisional default (justification) that it might be F.

The term "default" derives from the use of this notion in artificial intelligence, where a frame (or concept) inside a network of frames is normally linked to a set of default values for different parameters (which may be represented as stereotypical inferences of the kind "if x is a husband then x is a male," and so on); we typically accept all these inferences, ready to change them in the light of new information.[25] Using Brandom's (1994) terminology, we are *entitled* to assert

what we assert under a provisional justification and a looseness assumption. The meaning of a referential description will then become:

 "the *x* for which there is a provisional default justification that it might be F."

This last definition seems stronger than the WIT, but it is just a different way to express the normative character of the expectations linked to a linguistic practice of relying on loose talk. Justification is what permits us to explain the variety of uses of a referential description that is not necessarily connected with the speaker's beliefs: it permits us to explain both the use of an apparently false description (like "the king" in Donnellan's example quoted in n. 7 here) to say something true, and the use of a so-called literally true description that goes against the existing practice (like "the impostor" in the same example). In fact, as Donnellan says, a referential description must rely on an established practice . . . *usually*. By this Donnellan admits that I may break the established practice, but why or when is not clear. I think it is reasonable to claim that I may break an established practice if I have a justification. In Donnellan's example, I am justified in calling the impostor "king" given my knowledge of the actual situation; and in saying "the impostor is G" I run the risk of not being understood, or of being killed. In this unfortunate case I would be executed with the meager consolation of having strenuously defended what somebody would still call, strictly speaking, the "literal meaning" of the term "impostor." The point is not what kind of justification is given, but rather that there *must* be a justification of some kind that entitles me to make the assertion.

Summarizing what I have argued in this section: notwithstanding his view on intentions and direct reference, even Donnellan could not avoid giving a role to language as a social enterprise constrained by shared practices, conventions, and expectations. A direct connection with what somebody has in mind is not enough to make a proper act of reference. We also need to give

space in our semantic theories to a normative–epistemic aspect of language use: a speaker *should* choose a descriptive content for her use of definite descriptions such that hearers with a minimum level of epistemic vigilance[26] may be able to be led to the object she has in mind. The idea of inaccuracy or looseness better explains DISC and Donnellan's suggestion, according to which the descriptive content of a referential description also has a *partial* role in the determination of *what is said*. One part of the determination of what is said is given by the intention to refer; another part is given by the social intention to make the hearer corefer, given an established practice in the context of utterance.

The speaker implicitly takes this epistemic feature into account in expressing what she says, and what is said can be evaluated as either true or false under this conventional epistemic requirement. If the speaker does not follow this requirement, we would say that no proposition has been *expressed* (as happens with children who do not properly manage the use of lexicon). Although the speaker may have a referent in mind, she may be unable to refer to it in language and therefore may fail to make other people corefer.[27]

7.6 Two ways of presenting a weakened inertness thesis

There are two ways to develop a WIT (or its strengthened form, the PRODET) for definite descriptions, depending on whether we that think referential descriptions contribute a singular proposition or a general proposition. I am uncertain as to which one is the best way to *represent* the widespread and efficient *uses* of misdescriptions, and I will try both directions.

If we think that referential descriptions contribute a singular proposition, we may partly follow Almog's viewpoint and take definite descriptions to be contextuals: their referent is dependent on the context of utterance and the same description may be used to refer to different

individuals in different contexts. This solution might seem to be what Recanati called the "weak interpretation" of direct reference. One of his objections to this weak interpretation was that it does not account for the use of misdescriptions. It should be now clear how we could justify misdescriptions as contextuals that fix the reference in context. In Kaplan (1989b) an indexical like "I" has a character ("the speaker in the context") that, given the context, fixes the content— that is, a constant function from every possible world to the same individual. Following the analogy with the character of indexicals, referential descriptions should have a common kind of linguistic meaning that, given the context, fixes the content; but how can we define a character common to all different definite descriptions? In this proposal, the character of a "loose" referential description would be "the individual the speaker has at least a default reason to call 'F' in the context." Given the context, this character fixes the content—that is, the function that, for all possible worlds, fixes the unique individual that satisfies the default description in the (possible world of the) context.

If we think that referential descriptions contribute a general proposition, we cannot simply choose a *de re* belief attribution—where "*s*" is a speaker—as

$$\exists x \text{ (believes } (s, Fx) \text{ and } Gx)$$

because we have seen that a misdescription can be used also without the presumption that the speaker believes it to be true. We may therefore give a more general formulation, allowing a role for the descriptive content; this role should be accounted for in our semantics through a pragmatic procedure that filters contents in contexts. We may think therefore of something like:

$$\text{in C: [the } x\text{: } \Delta \, Fx] \, Gx$$

where "Δ" expresses the procedure according to which we select the pragmatic processing, depending on the level of approximation required. Applied to the husband example, this would

mean: "the only x for which there is [at least by default] a justification to call him F is G"—or, shortly,

"the individual having the property F by default is G."

This is not only a question of right communication links, but also a question of *conventional ways of using a definite description* to express what a speaker has in mind. We have here connected loose talk and truth conditions, explaining the possibility envisaged by Donnellan of treating utterances with misdescriptions as stating something true or false.

If, even with a default assumption of reasonable context, the description does not match any object, the description either fails or has to be taken as attributive.[28]

7.7 Conclusions

I have distinguished *loose* talk and *strict* talk; we might even regard Russell and Donnellan as attempting to define the rules of both kinds of uses of language. Russell was looking for a theory of strict talk, where words are taken at face value expressing the conventional Cambridge Dictionary definitions of lexical items; I have interpreted Donnellan's quotations (DISC) as suggesting a *theory of loose talk*, where words may be taken as tools to get the referent right by using default inferences connected to lexical items, together with an implicit epistemic agreement on the level of accepted looseness. A simple way to treat the matter is that the former is a semantic theory and the latter a theory of communication. However, I also suggested the idea, not normally welcome, of inserting an epistemological assumption into semantics. The proposal presented here has some advantages with respect to previous attempts to face the problem of misdescriptions in Donnellan's work.

The first and main advantage of the WIT over competing theories coincides with the main purpose of the paper: it is to vindicate Donnellan's view according to which a speaker claims something to be true with a referential use of a description even if the description does not literally and exactly give the property or properties that satisfy the individual in question. This result is the main motivation for the present chapter and would be sufficient to justify the effort of producing it. In fact, rejecting a strong inertness thesis (Martí 2008, Almog 2012, Recanati 2013b), the WIT helps recovering a unified treatment of definite descriptions as an original version of the unificationist theory. The strategy could be extended to incomplete descriptions, in agreement with criticism (already given by Donnellan 1968) against considering incomplete descriptions as elliptical by comparison with more complete ones. Inserting a "default" interpretation that is not an enrichment in the meaning of a definite description avoids making the passage from the quantificational structure of a definite description to referential uses a mystery, as it seems to happen in Neale (2004) and Soames (2005) (see n. 3 here).

In short,, a unificationist view in the form of the WIT is intended to answer Devitt's challenge as to which a quantificational view of definite description should give "a plausible account of why the speaker would think that saying the general proposition will convey the singular one and why the hearer would take the saying of the general one to convey the singular one" (Devitt 2007: 19). The WIT attempts an explanation of this point and of why speakers use misdescriptions and hearers understand them; in so doing, the WIT develops a suggestion presented by Bach (2004, 2007a) about a kind of pragmatic regularity of the referential uses of descriptions.

Besides this central point, the proposal has other advantages over the standard theory:

- Although keeping the Russellian logical form (updated with generalized quantifiers), it avoids Devitt's (2007) criticism of the unificationist theory in the form of a Gödelian completion as a de facto renouncement to a proper unificationist view (see n. 4).

- The WIT can therefore reject Devitt's ambiguity view, making his argument from misdescription empty and keeping the advantages of a unificationist account. This move permits a reconsideration of the relationships between referential uses and attributive uses (i) by making the latter dependent on the former and (ii) by postulating a two-step solution to attributive descriptions, as given by the apparent failure of finding a reasonable referent in the context of utterance, ~~coherently with analogous results on complex demonstratives~~ (see n. 29 here). Therefore this solution also answers criticisms to Recanati's view of the double uses of referential and attributive descriptions, as given in Neale 1990, ch. 3, n. 36).

- The proposal inherits something from the idea of a reference-fixing description criticized by Recanati, but avoids its shortcomings. It avoids a rendering of misdescriptions like "the F" as "what the speaker thinks or believes it is F," which would make everything acceptable (as suggested by Sainsbury 2004 and 2005 as an interpretation of Donnellan's misdescriptions); on the contrary, it gives restrictions or felicity conditions for the act of referring, distinguishing loose and defective uses of definite descriptions. In this way, against the philosopher's attempt to put too high the expectation of precision in definite descriptions (according to Neale 1990, all speech acts with a misdescription are defective; does this mean that they are cases of misfiring?), the WIT explains why we regularly use incomplete and inaccurate descriptions.

- Reasoning on Donnellan's views on shared practices and on his reference to the importance of the descriptive content opens the way to a reconsideration of his work inside the debate on the boundary between semantics and semantics; it also opens the way to a better recognition of loose talk as governing conversation and general rationality. At the same time the proposal is not made through a typical "enrichment" of the content, but by inserting a default assumption on the limited knowledge of the participants to a conversation.

When authors claim that Donnellan's point is to give a view from above, they are just stating a basic fact about ideal semantic theories; but they might miss the new perspective brought about by Donnellan's analysis of the *uses* of language, uses that—given our limited knowledge—have to rely on an implicit agreement on loose talk.[29]

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[1] According to Leonard Linsky, saying of a spinster "Her husband is kind to her" is neither true nor false, because it presupposes that the lady has a husband; however, the speaker could succeed in referring. Donnellan accepts the idea that the statement is neither true nor false *if* the description is used attributively, but if the descriptions is used referentially the statement is either true or false: "If we think about *what the speaker said* about the person he referred to, then there is no reason to suppose he has not said something true or false about him, even though he is not the lady's husband" (Donnellan 1966: 23–4, at 26, my italics; page references are from the version of this article reprinted in Donnellan 2012). Donnellan (1966: 21) rejects the idea of semantic ambiguity of attributive and referential descriptions and says that it is perhaps a question of pragmatic ambiguity, because "the distinction between the roles that the description plays is a function of the speaker's intentions."

[2] Michael Devitt accepts Kripke's claim that we can speak only of semantic ambiguity but rejects Kripke's Russellian solution, claiming that definite descriptions have an ambiguous *semantic* status

between a quantificational reading and a direct referential one. Devitt's ground for this claim is not only that using a definite description we *may* refer directly and not through an implicature, but that we *regularly* do so: there is a regular *convention* of using "the *F* is *G*" to express a singular proposition. Referential descriptions become analogous with complex demonstratives like "that *F*,," thus explaining also the use of incomplete descriptions, which creates so many difficulties for a quantificational Russellian treatment.

[3] What is generally accepted (even by Devitt) is the Kripkean solution to *misdescriptions* as generating implicatures. On the contraposition between supporters of a Kripkean unificationist view and Devitt's ambiguity theory, see Neale (2004: 69–70). Among the many discussions and refinements of the standard view, Sainsbury (2004, 2005) chooses to abandon Russell's logical form while preserving Russell's truth conditions. On the other hand, many follow Neale in accepting the Russellian logical form for referential descriptions: we may represent "the *F*" in its referential use as its Gödelian completion, that is, "the *x Fx* & (*x* = that)." However, Devitt considered this adjustment as a "victory" for the referentialist camp, suggesting that Neale's proposal is only "pseudo-Russellian" (see Devitt 2007: 28–31).

[4] Nevertheless Burge (2009: 290–1) criticizes Kripke and Donnellan for not inquiring "into the background of mental representation that is inevitably present in such cases." This is exactly the aim of the present chapter, which intends to develop suggestions given by Burge on perception: in perception we may perceive and think about an entity even if our perceptual system mistakes near all the features of that entity. However, "there are limits on how mistaken a perception can be" (Burge 2009: 291). I would like to define limits on how mistaken a description can be.

[5] And not only for them; even a "Fregean" account given in a situational semantics framework cannot overcome the problem of the referential use of misdescriptions; see Elbourne (2013, ch. 5) and Schwarz (2014: 2–3).

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[6] I refer here to the basic idea of acceptance entertained by Stalnaker and developed by von Fintel (2008), when he says that accomodation is "the process by which the context is adjusted quietly and without fuss to accept the utterance of a sentece that imposes certain requirements on the context in which it is processed." I think, however, that we need something more specific than a presuppositional analyis in treating misdescriptions.

[7] According to Recanati (2010), a modulation function takes as arguments expressions (E) and their contexts of utterance (C) in order to give an interpretation of the expression. Therefore a referential description, although incomplete, may undergo a process of modulation (broadening, narrowing, or enrichment) in order to become appropriate to pick the referent the speaker has in mind. Neale (1990: 110–112) had remarked that it seems difficult to have a unitary meaning and different kinds of propositions. If we treat definite descriptions like indexicals, we should treat them analogously to indexicals, whose unitary meaning produces different contents in different contexts, but always expressing the same *kind* of proposition. A more specific criticism concerning primary pragmatic processing is given in Vignolo (2012: 627): enrichment and loosening can turn an incomplete definite description into a complete one by restricting or broadening the conditions of application of the descriptive part; free enrichment and loosening, however, "do not explain how descriptions can turn their semantic status from that of denoting to that of referring expressions."

[8] Concerning "even though I know he is a female in disguise": although, speaking of referential descriptions, there is typically "a presumption that the speaker *believes* that what he refers to fits the description," Donnellan accepts and takes into consideration cases where we can use a description while knowing it to be false. He gives the example of a place where everybody believes (or pretends to believe) that a certain man is the king, but I know that he is a usurper; then, in saying "the king," Donnellan comments, "I succeed in referring to the man I wish to refer to without myself believing that he fits the description" (Donnellan 1966: 14).

[9] A classic example is given by Stephen Schiffer (1981).

[10] Vignolo (2012: 629) has pointed out a difference between definite description and indexicals: "definite descriptions encode conceptual representations in virtue of their descriptive content that give access to background assumptions and knowledge that are relevant for inferring implicatures; this function goes beyond that of encoding instructions for the identification of the referent. That definite descriptions are expressions we use to induce implicatures is an essential feature that is a semantic regularity in their usage, distinguishing them from indexicals." What I intend to do here is give a much stronger role to descriptive content, not only to implicatures but also to truth conditions, or at least to assertibility conditions.

[11] An answer suggested by Bach (2007b: 40) is triangulation. Although relevant, however, triangulation is not enough (Penco 2010: 53), and some further epistemic requirement must be satisfied if we are to explain successful communication with misdescriptions.

[12] I adapt an argument of Glanzberg and Siegel (2006: 10–11) on complex demonstratives. The point is that (i) if we had an implicature, it should be possible to cancel it, but a cancellation here would be truly strange, given that it would amount to a contradiction of the form "her husband is kind to her, but he is not her husband" (in normal cases of cancellable implicature we have no contradiction: "some of the children are sleeping" implicates that not all children as sleeping, but it is not contradictory to cancel the implicature, as in "some of the children are sleeping—in fact they all are"); (ii) if we had an implicature, it should be possible to show which maxim is violated, but it seems that no maxim is violated when someone says "her husband is kind to her" (that "someone" being a person who believes the individual to be the husband and intends to refer to him with the predicate "husband"); (iii) we might directly speak of pragmatic inappropriateness given by a wrong presupposition, but this would change the standard rendering of misdescriptions. Besides, as Kaplan (2012: 145) has pointed out, if

we speak of presuppositions about the descriptive content it is not clear what could count as the asserted content.

[13] Donnellan (1974) is taken as providing an example of the idea of direct reference by Felicia Ackerman (1989: 08): "A useful way of capturing the notion of a directly referential term comes from Donnellan's explication of Russell's notion of a constituent of a proposition, as follows. If 'Socrates' is a directly referential term, the sentence 'Socrates is snub-nosed' expresses a proposition that can be represented as an ordered pair consisting of Socrates—the actual man, not his name—and the property, being snub-nosed." The example, however, is made with a proper name, not with a definite description.

[14] The smaller the context is, the larger the varieties of uses of lexical items will be. To make an extreme case, Donnellan presents us with a possible conversation between Alice and Humpty Dumpty: "Had Humpty Dumpty prefaced his comment to Alice with an explicit stipulation of what he would mean by the word 'glory,' the episode could not have been used by Lewis Carroll to raise a problem about meaning. By stating that by 'glory' he would mean 'a nice knockdown argument,' Humpty Dumpty could expect Alice to understand him correctly when he said, 'There's glory for you'" (Donnellan 1968: 213). This means that a practice has to be established in a context to permit the right expectations. It seems to me that the link to an established practice is what is missing in Sainsbury's rendering of Donnellan's referential uses, which runs as follows:

> For all x ("the F" refers to x as uttered by u iff x = the thing that u intends his utterance to concern and such that u thinks he can achieve appreciation of this intention by using "the F").

Missing the link to an established practice, this definition leaves too much freedom to choose any description whatsoever, and this is probably one of the reasons why Sainsbury (2004, 2005) rejects Donnellan's viewpoint in favor of adhering to a standard Kripkean solution of misdescriptions.

[15] Marino (2011: 89), discussing Donnellan (1968), remarks that some action is needed to accomplish reference and, "even if an internal dubbing has occurred and has fixed reference, until some external action is performed it is not right to say that fully-fledged reference has occurred. Reference needs externalization." And externalization has two main constraints: conventional meanings and expectations about the audience.

[16] There is an apparent relation between this characterization and a probabilistic rendering. However, if expectations were treated in a probabilistic way, we might—probably—miss some normative aspects that expectations carry along with them (for an argument on the difference between probability and default reasoning on normative features, see Karlsson 1995). Therefore speaking of default reasoning would be more appropriate: default reasoning as "reasoning to the first unchallenged alternative" may be a clue to understanding the use of default descriptions. I took the suggestion, maybe against his intentions, from Bach (1994 [1987]), and developed my "provisional default thesis" described later in this chapter at paragraph 5.

[17] See Recanati (2015). While implicatures are communicated *in addition* to the literal sense, metaphors and narrowings are intended as *alternative* contents with respect to the literal sense, even if there is a link to the lexicon ("the person who ordered the ham sandwich" is locally inferred from the use of "the ham sandwich"). The modulation is therefore a local inference that *generates* the correct interpretation of the utterance. As we will see, the solution proposed here is an extension of this kind of treatment.

[18] Korta and Perry (2011: 96–101) give a wide phenomenology of cases of inaccurate descriptions as a typical condition of linguistic exchange, showing different ways in which speakers make objects contextually available to hearers. Donnellan (1968: 209) himself speaks of the "*inaccurate way*" in which a referential description is typically used, where we may say that there is a "near miss" (e.g. "the man drinking champagne" is a near miss because the man is drinking something sparkling in a champagne glass) or something "missed wildly" (e.g. "her husband" might be considered missed

wildly because the man in question is a lover and not a legal husband). Yet the referential use of the description works, and it works just because we are accustomed to a loose use of language. Even philosophers, who typically require exactness in every description, cannot avoid some level of looseness in everyday talk.

[19] Also Kaplan (2012: 144) refers to the looseness of some descriptions—looseness "that allows for mischaracterization"; but he does not develop this point. Insisting mainly on the idea that, according to Donnellan, "the speaker has the intended reference in mind prior to the formation of the description and in a way that is independent of the description used," Kaplan (2012: 143) misses the suggestion of the main argument against a Humpty Dumpty theory of definite descriptions. He makes, however, the interesting step of dividing two aspects of "having in mind": the issue of *initiation* from the issue of *transmission*. The issue treated here is the latter, but might also impinge on the former (how can you have something in mind if you don't know what sort of thing you have in mind?).

[20] We might also say that we *always* defer to some implicit assumptions, against Bach's *principle of expressibility*, according to which what is said may always be made fully explicit. This point would deserve more space, but I will leave it for another occasion. However, for a criticism of Bach's expressibility requirement, see Carston (2013).

[21] I adapt the example of Glanzberg and Siegel (2006). They take two sentences: A. That mouse is hungry; B. That thing reasonably taken to be a mouse is hungry. I quote the argument given on page 14: "Suppose we are in a zoology lecture. The lecturer informs us that mice and shrews can reasonably be mistaken for one another, and that even experts sometimes make mistakes. But the lecturer goes on to show us one animal of each kind, and shows us precisely how to tell which one is which. She can certainly go on to say (B) twice in succession, once pointing to the mouse, and once pointing to the shrew which she has just explained can be reasonably taken for a mouse. Assuming the animals really are hungry, both utterances of (B) are true. In contrast, we get no such judgment for the corresponding

uses of (A). There, when she is pointing at the shrew (which was just explained not to be a mouse), there is a strong judgment that her utterance of (A) cannot be true. More importantly, there is a strong differential judgment between (A) and (B). This is incompatible with the prediction that they are synonymous."

[22] A possible way out (with the disadvantage of an unecessary multiplication of properties) is to assign different properties to the same lexical item, depending on the kind of justification required by the context, as Williamson (2005) suggests in the case of the much debated example of "tall" (that may mean "tall for a jockey" or "tall for a basketball player").

[23] "It is possible—and this is important—to say a *great deal* about a fine aesthetic difference. The first thing you say may, of course, be just: '*This* word fits, *that* doesn't'—or something of the kind. But then you can discuss all the extensive ramifications of the tie-up effected by each of the words. That first judgment is *not* the end of the matter, for it is the field of force of a word that is decisive" (Wittgenstein 1953: §219).

[24] As suggested before, a probabilistic theory might enter at this point; the guesswork is always based on some kind of subjective probability. Also theories on shallow processing or "good enough" representations go in this direction, although basically about comprehension. See for instance Ferreira, Bailey, and Ferrari (2002) or Frisson (2009)

[25] See n. 16 here.

[26] See Mazzarella (2016: 188).

[27] We may therefore have the same results as the nominal policy of Glanzberg and Siegel (2006) without the rejection of the WIT, and this would allow for a better rendering of the implicit epistemic agreements in the working of everyday conversation.

[28] There has been abundant discussion on the relative priority of attributive and referential uses of descriptions. Attributive uses have often been taken to be prior to referential ones; recently Devitt

(2007) and Bach (2007b) have claimed that there might be no priority of the one with respect to the other. In his view on "strengthened meaning," Vignolo (2015) treats referential uses as prior to attributive ones. The strategy followed in this chapter suggests that there is a priority in referential uses (with descriptions in the subject position inside assertions) with respect to attributive ones, and the attributive ones would be activated when the procedures to pick a referent from the context do not succeed. It is reasonable to think that the learning process begins with referential uses and attributive uses are learned afterwards. This might also have been Russell's view: "All thinking has to start from acquaintance; but it succeeds in thinking about many things with which we have no acquaintance" (Russell 1905: 480). Loose uses of descriptions may help with a strategy of differentiating between attributive and referential uses as steps in interpretation. In fact, assuming that we use general pragmatic procedures, we may think that, if these procedures do not work, then the hearer—not finding anything in the context that even loosely fits the description—is led to skip to an attributive interpretation. We may find similar results in the treatment of referential and descriptive uses of indexicals: Kijania-Placek (2015) suggests that descriptive uses of indexicals arise when a referential interpretation fails. This implies that the referential use of indexicals is primary, and the other uses are derived. It is not awkward to hypothesize something similar for the uses of definite descriptions.

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