

WITTGENSTEIN AND  
SEMANTIC PRESUPPOSITIONS OF  
DEFINITE DESCRIPTIONS  
IN SUBJECT-POSITION

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PhD Thesis

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY  
UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

1992



## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I alone have composed this thesis, and that, except where stated otherwise, the work presented within is my own.

Paulo Roberto Margutti Pinto

1992



To Beth,  
Vivian, Leo and Claudia,  
who always loved and trusted me.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am extremely grateful to my present supervisor, Stanley Eveling, for offering me his helping hand when I thought everything was lost and could not see any light at the end of the tunnel. The several pages with comments and challenges that he wrote to me are the living proof not only of his generosity, but also of his being a profound thinker. I shall never forget the intellectual adventure that I experienced through our dialogue in the past two years.

I thank with immense gratitude Peter Lewis, for his generous help. I owe him several kind, penetrating and useful comments during various stages of my work.

Thanks must go to Larry Brisckman for his generous support at a critical stage of my work.

For their heartening friendship and overall support, I am deeply grateful to Cherryl Foster, Gerold Taylor and Haiden Ramsey.

I am also grateful to my former supervisor, John Slaney, for his friendship and comments at an earlier stage of my work.

I am also indebted to Linda Alexander, for her friendly support at the Department of Philosophy's Office.

I am grateful to my colleagues and good friends Carlos Roberto Drawin and Ivan Domingues for their support at the Department of Philosophy of the Federal University of Minas Gerais, Brazil. I would also like to thank my friends Jose Arthur do Nascimento Penna and Gabriel

Rodrigues Silva for their support in Belo Horizonte, Brazil.

I wish to express my gratitude to my colleagues at the Department of Philosophy of the Federal University of Minas Gerais, Brazil, for all their support during my leave of absence.

I am also deeply indebted to the Brazilian Research Council, 'CNPq', for the financial support I needed to accomplish my research work.

Finally, I am specially indebted to my sister-in-law Maria Lucia Bernardes Rodrigues, who patiently and efficiently took care of everything during my absence from home.

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this work is to characterize the problem of semantic presuppositions generated by definite descriptions in subject-position in the light of a reassessment of the semantic framework of the Russell/Strawson controversy and analyze what would be the early and the later Wittgenstein's solution to such a problem.

In the first part, the Russell/Strawson controversy is characterized. On the basis of Strawson's account, a general concept of semantic presupposition against which other theories may be tested is constructed. This allows the formulation of the problem above mentioned. Further analysis of the accounts involved reveals that Frege's concept of a 'semantic prerequisite' generated by definite descriptions in subject-position is an instance of the general concept. But Frege also held the view that simple proper names do not generate semantic prerequisites. The Fregean referential dualism suggests that the Russell/Strawson controversy, as far as only these authors' accounts are involved, is undecidable at the purely semantic level. This is the semantic framework against which Wittgenstein's philosophies are tested in the second part.

The "Tractatus" adopts a modified version of the Russellian Theory of Descriptions. Even so, the Tractarian account seems to be ultimately equivalent to Russell's. Further analysis reveals that the doctrine of simple signs in isolation, but not its conjunction with the picture theory, is consistent with the general concept of semantic presupposition.

The "Investigations" adopts the programmatic principle of searching for the use of the words. But the question about the 'referring use' of descriptions in a specific language-game is consistent with, and in the spirit of, the "Investigations". The framework of the question involves the appeal to the Kripkean notions of 'semantic referent' and 'speaker's referent'. The analysis of the referring use in the language-game of reporting an event reveals that the later Wittgenstein tends to reject the semantic concept of presupposition. Further analysis reveals that he would tend to reject Russell's Theory of Descriptions and most of the variants of the pragmatic concept. The analysis seems to confirm that the Russell/Strawson dispute is idle at the purely semantic level. Even so, the later Wittgenstein's account of language is such that it is possible to imagine some particular language-games in which relationships occur that bear some analogies with the one of semantic presupposition.

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## INTRODUCTION

The word 'presupposition', in its most usual sense, refers to certain conditions which must be fulfilled so that a certain state of affairs can obtain. In this sense, presupposition is a species of entailment: if a certain state of affairs obtains, then some conditions are satisfied. As such, the concept of presupposition plays an important role in metaphysics. Kant's doctrine of the presuppositions of scientific knowledge and Collingwood's doctrine of absolute presuppositions are two significative examples among several others.

But there is another sense of the word 'presupposition': it may refer to a logical relationship which is distinct from entailment. As such, 'presupposition' denotes the conditions which must be satisfied so that some expressions of our language can refer to an object. In this sense, we normally use the expression 'semantic presupposition'. Although controversial, the concept of semantic presupposition has played an important role in Anglo-American philosophy in the last 40 years. This may be explained by the philosophical commitments entailed by the concept. In fact, if the concept expresses an existing logical relation in our language, then it may be a powerful instrument in the analysis of some complex referential mechanisms; but if the concept is empty, then it may be a powerful source of misunderstanding in the analysis of these mechanisms. Thus, philosophers are somehow compelled to take a position on the issue.

B. Russell, for example, in his papers "On

Denoting" (1905) and "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism" (1918), explained the referential mechanism of definite descriptions in a way such that the concept of semantic presupposition was excluded. According to Russell, definite descriptions are only apparently referring expressions. They are in fact 'incomplete symbols' which originate a complex conjunction of propositional functions when the sentences containing them are fully analyzed. In addition, descriptions must be distinguished from logically proper names. A logically proper name always denotes an object. The logically proper name can have a meaning, even though the sentence in which the name occurs has no meaning at all. A definite description, in turn, has no meaning by itself. The meaning of the description is determined by the meaning of the sentence in which it occurs. Therefore, definite descriptions are not logically proper names. Russell's Theory of Descriptions was considered a brilliant example of analysis for quite a long time.

Approximately five years after the end of the Second World War, Strawson challenged the Russellian account. In his papers "On Referring" (1950), "A reply to Mr. Sellars" (1954), and in his books "Introduction to Logical Theory" (1952), and "Individuals" (1959), Strawson developed a Theory of Presuppositions which is applied to definite descriptions in subject-position. According to Strawson, Russell's Theory of Descriptions is mistaken. A sentence containing a definite description in subject-position implies that the object referred to by the description exists. But the word 'implies' has not its usual sense here. Accordingly, it cannot be understood as a synonym of 'entails'. It expresses a new kind of logical relationship. Later on, in his "Introduction to Logical Theory", Strawson exchanges 'implies' for 'presupposes' and gives a more accurate definition of the relationship in question: a statement 'S' presupposes a statement 'P'



if the truth of 'P' is a precondition of the truth-or-falsity of 'S' (Strawson 1952: 175). So, Strawson firmly opposes to the Theory of Descriptions and installs the debate on the issue. The reaction of the philosophical community to Strawson's views was one of controversy.

In his challenge to the Theory of Descriptions, Strawson seems to have revived a Fregean view. There are indications that in the famous paper "Ueber Sinn und Bedeutung" (1892), Frege introduced the concept of semantic presupposition in order to explain the reference of certain subordinate clauses in ordinary speech. The Fregean analysis of subordinate clauses involved the analysis of definite descriptions in subject-position. Frege's concept seems to express the relation of semantic presupposition because it requires that the truth of a presupposed thought be a necessary condition for the corresponding presupposing thought to have a reference. His concept is basically an attempt to uncover a failure in ordinary language which allows for the existence of empty expressions. Such expressions, although having a correct grammatical form, fail to designate an object. The mentioned failure can only be avoided by a logically perfect language in which every grammatically well constructed expression designates an object. But it is not clear whether or not Frege in fact held a view of semantic presupposition. Given that the Frege's view is likely to be one of the sources of the Russell/Strawson dispute, a more accurate analysis of Frege's account is required.

After Strawson's challenge of Russell by means of the concept of semantic presupposition, the framework for further discussion was somehow established. Philosophers dealing with presupposition usually refer to the debate originated by the opposition between the Russellian and the Strawsonian approach. But the dispute seems to be undecided so far. Thus, it seems that further



investigation is needed in order to obtain a more perspicuous view of the semantic aspects involved by the issue.

The interest on the Russell/Strawson controversy is very much alive in contemporary philosophy. The recent approaches became increasingly sophisticated and added new questions to the old ones. But the semantic framework of the Russell/Strawson debate remains a strong point of reference for the discussion. One surprising thing is that neither Russell's account nor Strawson's seems to do justice to the referential mechanism which is hidden in the way definite descriptions are used in subject-position. In fact, it is not evident that a sentence involving a definite description in subject-position can be rendered by Russell's complicated paraphrase. As to Strawson's account, the very disputability of the concept of semantic presupposition speaks for itself. Even so, as it has been said, the opposition between the two philosophers remains a crucial point of reference.

Another equally surprising thing is the fact that what underlies the dispute is the basic question about the very possibility of semantic presupposition : is this relation an adequate explanation for the referential function of definite descriptions in subject-position or not? This is so far an open question.

If we now turn to Wittgenstein, it is a commonplace to say that he has developed at least two different and important philosophies throughout his life. In the "Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus", it seems that a specific account of the referential mechanism of definite descriptions in subject-position plays an important, although not yet clearly explicated, role. The early Wittgenstein's account seems to be in clear opposition to the Strawsonian proposal. In the "Philosophical

Investigations", once again it seems that another specific account of the referential mechanism of definite descriptions plays an important, although not yet explicated, role. The later Wittgenstein's account seems to be more tolerant as regards the Strawsonian concept of presupposition, but no one knows to what extent.

If one now considers the importance of Wittgenstein's thought in contemporary philosophy, one realizes that a full understanding of his two different accounts might give an important contribution to the philosophical puzzle about the referential role of definite descriptions. Surprisingly, this subject has not yet been studied in detail in Wittgenstein's philosophies. We still do not know in detail how the early and the later Wittgenstein approaches the semantic presuppositions generated by definite descriptions in subject-position. Therefore, a study about the significance of the concept of presupposition in the evolution of Wittgenstein's thought is required.

The purpose of this research is then to make a study of each of Wittgenstein's possible accounts of the referential mechanism involved by definite descriptions in subject-position and test them against the reassessed semantic background which led to the conceptual framework of the Russell/Strawson dispute. In the light of this reassessment, my research question may be formulated as follows: what are the essential features of the early and the later Wittgenstein's account of the referential mechanism of definite descriptions in subject-position, and what is the contribution such accounts may possibly offer to a better understanding of the question about semantic presuppositions generated by definite descriptions in subject-position? This is an important question concerning the history of the concept of semantic presupposition.

An adequate answer to the above question will involve answering to some important subsidiary questions. For example, we will be able to tell: i) what is the specific contribution of Wittgenstein's early philosophy to a possible solution of the problem of the referential mechanism of definite descriptions; ii) what is the specific contribution of Wittgenstein's later philosophy to a possible solution of the problem of the referential mechanism of definite descriptions; iii) what is the basic difference between Wittgenstein's early and later approach to the referential mechanism involved by definite descriptions in subject-position? Both the research question and its subsidiary questions require an answer which will help in a better understanding of the history of the problem concerning the referential mechanism of definite descriptions in subject-position.

The main steps to be taken in order to accomplish the task proposed will be as follows. My work will have three parts. In the first one, I shall present and discuss some aspects of the semantic background of the Russell/Strawson controversy. The first part will be subdivided into two chapters. In chapter 1, I shall make a characterization of the Russell/Strawson controversy and then construct a general concept of semantic presupposition to be tested against the accounts involved. On the basis of the general concept, I shall formulate and discuss the relevant aspects of the question of which the answer will be pursued in the analysis of Wittgenstein's philosophies. The question will be called 'the problem of semantic presuppositions generated by definite descriptions in subject-position'. In chapter 2, some aspects of the Fregean semantics will be discussed. This will provide us with the elements required for analyzing the semantic features of the Russell/Strawson controversy. The whole discussion is intended to provide the general framework for analyzing Wittgenstein's solutions to the

above problem.

In the second part, I shall analyze Wittgenstein's solutions to the problem as formulated in chapter 1. Part two will be subdivided into two chapters. In chapter 3, I shall analyze the early Wittgenstein's account of the referential role of definite descriptions in subject-position against the background of the reassessed semantic aspects of the Russell/Strawson controversy. In chapter 4, *mutatis mutandis*, I shall do the same with the later Wittgenstein's account. The main source for the analysis of the early philosophy will be the "Tractatus", and the main source for the analysis of the later philosophy will be the "Philosophical Investigations". The remaining Wittgensteinian works will be used as supplementary sources of information. The intermediary period of Wittgenstein's philosophy will not be considered.

In the third and final part, I shall formulate the main conclusions of the previous analysis.

For reasons of space, I shall concentrate my discussion on the semantic presuppositions generated by definite descriptions in subject-position. Some related problems will be considered only by the way; others, like the projection problem, will simply be left aside. The relevant connexions which obtain among these accounts and related problems, such as e.g. referential function of proper names, will be considered. Given that the bibliography on the problem of semantic presupposition is huge, papers of secondary importance will be left aside. The terminology will be adapted to the analysis of each account.

The expectation is that the above procedure will allow me to formulate the problem of semantic

presuppositions generated by definite descriptions in subject-position in its essential terms and deal as accurately as possible with Wittgenstein's own approaches to the problem.

PART ONE

## CHAPTER 1

### CHARACTERIZATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE PROBLEM OF SEMANTIC PRESUPPOSITIONS GENERATED BY DEFINITE DESCRIPTIONS IN SUBJECT-POSITION

#### I - PRELIMINARY REMARKS

In this chapter, I shall try to characterize and discuss the framework of the main question with which I shall be concerned in my work. As already mentioned in the introduction, the question is related to the Russell/Strawson controversy concerning the referential role of definite descriptions in subject-position. Thus, in order to characterize the question, I shall do as follows. First, I shall present and discuss the relevant aspects of Russell's Theory of Descriptions. Second, I shall present and discuss the relevant aspects of Strawson's alternative account to Russell's Theory. Third, on the basis of Strawson's concept, I shall try to construct and discuss a general concept of semantic presuppositions generated by definite descriptions in subject-position. Fourth, on the basis of the opposition between Russell's account and the general concept of semantic presupposition obtained, I shall try to formulate and discuss the question with which I shall be concerned in my work. The question will be called "the problem of semantic presuppositions generated by definite descriptions in subject-position". I expect it will be revealed that, although the problem has been defined in terms of the Russell/Strawson controversy, there are important solutions to the problem which are not based



upon the axis of the dispute. Some of these alternative solutions will then be presented and discussed in order to make complete the background to the problem.

## II - RUSSELL'S ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE PLAYED BY DEFINITE DESCRIPTIONS IN SUBJECT-POSITION

In his famous paper "On Denoting", B. Russell acknowledges the importance of the subject of denoting for logic, mathematics and theory of knowledge (1905: 479). He is concerned with what he calls 'denoting phrases', such as 'a man', 'some man', 'every man', and so on. These expressions include phrases containing the definite article. Now Russell thinks definite descriptions have a privileged status among denoting phrases. In his words,

"These are by far the most interesting and difficult of denoting phrases" (1905: 481).

In order to justify his claim, Russell invokes the fact that the word 'the', when it is strictly used, involves uniqueness (id.). Thus, he paraphrases a sentence like

(1) 'The father of Charles II was executed'

by

(2) 'There is at least one x such that x begot Charles II,

AND

for all y,

if y begot Charles II, y is identical with x

AND

x was executed'<sup>1</sup>.

The above paraphrase or any of its equivalents is the



well-known Russellian Theory of Descriptions. When occupying the subject-position in an assertion, the definite description 'the father of Charles II' is dissected into a set of propositional functions asserting at the same time the existence and the uniqueness of someone who begot Charles II. In order to simplify my terminology and facilitate exposition, I shall divide the conjunction expressed by (2) into its three basic components, namely

(3) 'There is at least one  $x$  such that  $x$  begot Charles II',

(4) 'For all  $y$ , if  $y$  begot Charles II',  $y$  is identical with  $x$ '

and

(5) ' $x$  was executed'.

Given the fact that each of these sentences plays a particular role in the interpretation of (1), I shall name each of them in accordance with its respective role. Thus, (3) will be named 'defining clause', because it is the function involving the property that defines the object apparently denoted by the definite description; (4) will be named 'uniqueness clause', because it is the function attributing uniqueness to this object; (5) will be named 'predicate clause', because it is the function attributing a determinate predicate to this object. This terminology roughly describes the basic roles played by the three clauses involved in the Russellian paraphrase of a sentence like (1), and may be adopted for convenience.

Now suppose the definite description is the grammatical subject of an existential sentence like

(6) 'The father of Charles II exists'.

In this case, Russell claims that the sentence is to be interpreted as

(7) 'There is at least one x such that x begot Charles II

AND

for all y,

if y begot Charles II', y is identical with x'.

(6) is now analyzed into the conjunction of a defining clause and a uniqueness clause. The predicate clause is missing. Thus, an existential sentence containing the definite description 'the father of Charles II' in subject-position is dissected into a complex conjunction of propositional functions asserting both the existence and the uniqueness of someone who begot Charles II. And it is worth noticing that, in all cases considered so far, the apparently denoting phrase vanishes after analysis.

Now the Russellian account of denoting phrases involves an explanation of the referential role of definite descriptions in subject-position. For the account reveals that definite descriptions are not authentic referring expressions. The word 'the' in a description only misleadingly suggests that the description is a referring expression. The description only apparently refers to an object in the world. For this reason, descriptions are what Russell calls 'incomplete symbols', that is, as symbols which have a meaning in use, but not in isolation (Russell 1925: 67). Thus, definite descriptions in subject-position, although they look like referring expressions, are in fact the external dressing for a complex conjunction of propositional functions. After analysis, the descriptions vanish and are replaced by the corresponding conjunction of propositional

functions at the same time asserting the existence, defining uniquely and ascribing a predicate to the object which fits the description and which is only apparently referred to by the description. With respect to the nature of the sentence containing a definite description in subject-position, the Russellian account entails some consequences of which the most important are related to: i) the adequacy of the description involved as regards the object described; ii) the sense of the sentence; iii) the truth-values yielded; iv) the ways the sentence may be negated; v) the language layers involved. These aspects will be discussed in what follows.

First, consider the adequacy of the description in subject-position to the object to which the description apparently refers. In virtue of the specifications made by both the defining and the uniqueness clause, the definite description applies uniquely to an object in the world. But this involves an important postulate. The description in subject-position must always be paraphrased in a way such that the complex expression obtained contains a propositional function which defines an object and is uniquely ascribed to it. In other words, Russell postulates that it is always possible to find an adequate propositional function that defines the object apparently referred to by the description in order to eliminate the word 'the'. In Russell's words:

"A phrase containing 'the' *always presupposes* some initial propositional function not containing 'the'; thus instead of 'x is the father of y' we ought to take as our initial function 'x begot y'; then 'the father of y' means the one value of x which satisfies this propositional function" (1925: 30; italics mine).

Although this constitutes an important assumption of the Theory of Descriptions, it has never been proved and may be properly called 'Russell's postulate'.

Second, consider the sense of the sentence containing a description in subject-position. As revealed by analysis, the assertion of existence and uniqueness of the object apparently referred to by the description is part of the whole assertion made by the sentence in question. In our previous example, if we assert that the father of Charles II was executed, we are simultaneously asserting the existence and uniqueness of someone who is father of Charles II.

Third, consider the truth-value of the proposition made by means of the sentence. Analysis reveals that a sentence of the form 'the D is P' is equivalent to a complex sentence beginning with the existential quantifier. Thus, if 'the D' makes sense, the complex sentence obtained yields a proposition which is always either true or false, but never truth-valueless. For a proposition of the form 'there is an x such that x is D and x is unique and x is P' has the following interesting property: if there is in fact an object satisfying the description, the proposition is true or false, depending on whether the property 'is P' fits or not the object; if there is not an object satisfying the description, then the proposition is simply false. This fact entails the important consequence that in Russell's account a sentence containing an empty definite description in subject-position always yields a false proposition when asserted. In fact, Russell's account establishes that every meaningful sentence yields a proposition that is either true or false, but never truth-valueless. Thus, the principle of bivalence applies universally to all sentences. Even the cases of referential failure with empty descriptions constitute no exception to this rule. And this fact surely gives the Theory of Descriptions a comfortable position with respect to classical semantics.

Fourth, consider the ways a sentence containing a definite description in subject-position may be negated in conformity with Russell's account. The negation of any such sentence may be interpreted in either of the following ways: i) as an external negation of the fact expressed by the whole sentence; ii) as an internal negation of the ascription of the predicate to the description. For example, if a speaker says that the father of Charles II was *not* executed, he may mean two quite different things by that. On the one hand, he may mean that *there is* a unique person who begot Charles II and this person was *not* executed. On the other hand, he may mean that *it is not the case* that there is a unique person who begot Charles II and was executed. In the former case, the description 'the father of Charles II' has what Russell calls a 'primary occurrence'; in the latter, it has what he calls a 'secondary occurrence'. This distinction entails that negation is ambiguous in ordinary language and enables Russell to explain the status of sentences containing empty descriptions in subject-position. Thus,

(8) 'The King of France is *not* bald'

is false if it means that *there exists* uniquely a King of France at present and he is *not* bald (primary occurrence of 'the King of France'); if (8) means that *it is not the case* that there exists uniquely a King of France at present and he *is* bald, then it is true (secondary occurrence of 'the King of France').

Fifth, consider the language layers involved by Russell's Theory. From the above paraphrase, one may infer that Russell postulates the existence of two layers of syntactic structure. In fact, the Theory of Descriptions assumes that there are two different and sometimes competing structures in the expressions and sentences of



ordinary language. These expressions and sentences have a surface grammatical structure which is misleading as regards the logical relations actually involved by them. For example, an expression occupying the position of the grammatical subject may in fact be a logical predicate; an expression occupying the position of a predicate may in fact be a logical subject; two sentences may have the same grammatical structure and yet have radically different logical structures; and so on. These expressions and sentences also have a deep logical structure which is somehow hidden beneath its surface grammatical structure. The logical structure reveals the real connexions existing among expressions, among sentences, and among expressions and sentences. According to Russell, this is the only way to escape from many logical and philosophical puzzles which have their origin in the naive acceptance of the deceptive surface grammatical form. The logically correct structure must be obtained by a meticulous and discriminating analysis of the surface form in order to reach its deep form equivalent.

Thus, the Russellian analysis unveiled, in a surprising way, that definite descriptions in subject-position are not authentic referring expressions. Their referential role is played in a somehow indirect way. In virtue of its fascinating explanatory power, Russell's account became a paradigm of logical analysis for quite a long time.

III- STRAWSON'S CHALLENGE TO RUSSELL'S  
ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE PLAYED BY  
DEFINITE DESCRIPTIONS IN SUBJECT-POSITION

Although brilliant, Russell's account of the referential role of definite descriptions in subject-position was not the sole alternative. Forty five years after the publication of "On Denoting", P. F. Strawson challenged Russell's Theory. In his equally famous paper "On Referring" (1950), Strawson turned his attention to the classes of expressions which are most commonly used in the uniquely referring way, like singular demonstrative pronouns, proper names, singular personal and impersonal pronouns, and phrases beginning with 'the' followed by a noun, qualified or unqualified, in the singular ('the so-and-so'). All these are what Strawson calls "referring expressions" (1950: 320). He confined his attention to cases in which the referring expression fulfils the twofold condition of being used in the uniquely referring way and of occurring as the grammatical subject of a sentence (1950: 320-1). This is clearly connected with the referential role of definite descriptions in subject-position.

In "On Referring", Strawson argued against Russell that definite descriptions are in fact authentic referring expressions. The statement made with a sentence containing a definite description in subject-position does not assert either the existence or the uniqueness of the object referred to by the description; instead, the statement *implies* the existence and uniqueness of the object. However, this is a very peculiar and odd sense of the word 'implies', because it is not the same as what the statement entails. That this is so is explained by the following reasons.

First, the existence and uniqueness of the object referred to by the description is a necessary condition for making a statement having a truth-value. Whenever one asserts, say,

(9) 'The King of France is bald',

one makes a true or false statement only if there is actually one and no more than one King of France.

Second, if there is no King of France on the occasion of the utterance of (9), then our linguistic intuition suggests that the question whether the statement is true or false simply does not arise.

Third, sentence (9) is significant even when there is no King of France, and the same applies to any sentence belonging to the same class as (9).

Fourth, a sentence like

(10) 'There is no King of France'

does not contradict (9). When true, (10) rather explains why the question whether (9) is true or false does not arise. To sum up, a sentence can be significant previously to its being used to make a true or false assertion. What makes a true or false statement is the use of the sentence. If the description contained in the sentence in fact refers to an object, then the use of the sentence yields a statement having a truth-value. In this case, we have truth-value and significance simultaneously. If, in turn, the description does not refer to any object at all, i.e. if it is empty, we only have significance and no truth-value. In contrast to Russell's account, this is what happens in fiction (1950: 329-31).



Thus, Strawson holds to a tetratomy in the classification of the uses of sentences containing a definite description as the grammatical subject. A sentence of this class can be either nonsensical or significant. On the one hand, if it is used in a way such that it disrespects the linguistic rules that yield meaning, then it is nonsensical. On the other hand, if it is used in compliance with such rules, then it is significant. But a significant sentence can be either correctly or spuriously used. If it is correctly used, that is, if the conditions of existence and uniqueness of the object mentioned by the description are fulfilled, then the statement made has a truth-value; otherwise, the question of truth-value does not arise.

Two years later, in his "Introduction to Logical Theory", Strawson adopted the word 'presupposition' to refer to what the use of a sentence containing a definite description in subject-position "oddly" implies. In his book, Strawson treats presupposition as a new logical relation which is in fact distinct from entailment. For example, if a statement 'C' entails a statement 'D', then it is surely contradictory to conjoin 'C' with the negation of 'D'. But if a statement 'C' presupposes a statement 'D', then, Strawson argues, the conjunction of 'C' with the negation of 'D' is another kind of logical absurdity. This is so because 'not D' makes 'C' false whenever 'C' entails 'D', but 'not D' makes 'C' truth-valueless whenever 'C' presupposes 'D' (1952: 175). If 'C' entails 'D' then the conjunction 'C and not D' is a contradiction; whereas if 'C' presupposes 'D', then the conjunction 'C and not D' is truth-valueless. Thus, it is possible for us to contradict a statement only when we accept its presuppositions (1952: 213).

Although Strawson asks a pragmatic question about the uniquely referring use, he obtains a semantic

relation between statements. In fact, he makes an important distinction between 'type', 'use of type' and 'utterance of type' (1950: 324-9). In our case, the 'type' is sentence (9) which can be used by different persons in different occasions. For example, a person may have *uttered* (9) in the reign of Louis XV. In this case, the person would have *used the type* involved in order to refer to Louis XV. Alternatively, another person may have *uttered* (9) in the reign of Louis XVI. Now this person would have *used the type* involved in order to refer to Louis XVI. But a person may also *utter* (9) in our days, mistakenly *using the type* in order to refer to the present King of France (this would give an odd status to (9)). Thus, Strawson's distinction entails that meaning (in at least one important sense) is a function of the type, whereas referring is a function of the use of the type (1950: 327). From the distinction it may be inferred that for a type to be meaningful it is sufficient that it can be used to make a statement assessable for truth-value, or alternatively, that tokens of it can make statements assessable for truth-value. Besides, a type may have a meaning even though some of its tokens do not make statements assessable for truth-value<sup>2</sup>.

As a result, in Strawson's view the uniquely referring use of a type sentence containing a definite description in subject-position may yield a statement which semantically presupposes another statement. For example, an utterance of (1) with the purpose of making a uniquely referring use of (1) yields a statement that semantically presupposes the statement made with

(11) 'There is exactly one father of Charles II'.

In fact, it may be inferred from Strawson's account that if the statement made with (11) is true, then the statement made with (1) and the one made with its negation

has a truth-value; if the statement made with (11) is false, then the tokens of (1) and its negation do not yield statements assessable for truth-value. The relation is between *statements*, not sentences, for the following reasons. First, only statements are assessable for truth-value; sentences are types which have many different uses; sentences may yield statements only if they are used in order to refer to something. Second, in Strawson's definition of presupposition the statements are not used, but mentioned; that is why they are quoted. A similar procedure occurs in Strawson's definition of entailment which also involves statements (1948).

Now there is an important ambiguity in Strawson's account. The ambiguity concerns the status of a token sentence when the presupposed statement is false. For example, if (1) ['The father of Charles II was executed'] is used to refer uniquely and there is no father of Charles II, then the token obtained may yield: i) a truth-valueless statement or ii) no statement at all. Unfortunately, Strawson is not explicit about the alternative to which he adheres. But it is possible to make a reasonable conjecture with respect to this<sup>3</sup>.

Suppose he adheres to (i). In this case, the use of (1) would yield a truth-valueless statement and Strawson's account would have to face the following consequences. First, he would have to abandon the principle of bivalence for non-existential statements containing empty descriptions in subject-position. Second, his distinction between 'sentence' and 'statement' would be somehow blurred. For it may be inferred from the above discussion that the essential feature of a statement is its assessability for a truth-value, whereas a sentence is not assessable for truth-value. Now if there are truth-valueless statements, this would require further qualifications in order to distinguish them from the type

sentence of which the statements are actual uses.

Now suppose Strawson adheres to (ii). In this case, an utterance of (1) does not yield a statement when there is no father of Charles II. The token of (1) is neither true nor false, for it is not assessable for truth-value. Here, bivalence would be preserved and the distinction between 'sentence' and 'statement' would be clear-cut. Thus, although this is only a conjecture, I would say that (ii) is more likely to be Strawson's position.

Despite the above ambiguity, Strawson succeeds in obtaining a purely *semantic* relation, because although the relation has been obtained by means of a pragmatic question concerning the referring use, it ultimately involves only statements and their truth-values, independently of considerations about speakers and contexts.

Now compare Strawson's account with Russell's. The accounts may be compared because they constitute alternative explanations of the same phenomenon. In doing the comparison, we shall obtain some understanding of the important differences in the way descriptions function and in the way a sentence containing a definite description in subject-position is interpreted.

First, consider the adequacy of the description to the object described. Given that Strawson needs not paraphrase the sentence containing the description in subject-position, he does not need to postulate a Russellian-like propositional function which would eliminate the definite article.

Second, consider the sense of a sentence containing a definite description in subject-position. By

contrast with Russell, the sense of the sentence in question does not express either the existence or the uniqueness of the object referred to by the description. In fact, the existence and uniqueness are rather implied, or presupposed, by the statement made with the sentence. Thus, when we assertorically use a sentence like (1), we are not asserting, but rather presupposing, that there is exactly one father of Charles II.

Third, consider the truth-value of the statement yielded by the sentence in question. Given the presuppositional relation defined by Strawson, whenever the presupposed statement is true, the statement made with the sentence will be assessable for truth-value; but if the presupposed statement is false, the token sentence involved will not yield a statement assessable for truth-value. For example, the uniquely referring use of (1) yields a statement assessable for truth-value, for the presupposed statement that there exists exactly one father of Charles II is true. However, if the presupposed statement is false, the uniquely referring use of (1) would not yield a statement assessable for truth-value. As a result, when we assertorically use a type sentence containing an empty description in subject-position, the token sentence involved does not yield a false proposition as in Russell's account, but yields no statement and has no truth-value.

Fourth, consider the ways the sentence in question may be negated. In Russell's case, a sentence like (1) may be negated in two ways, depending on whether the description has a primary or a secondary occurrence. In Strawson's case, there is no explicit treatment of negation and we shall have to make a conjecture. In this respect, I shall argue that, despite appearances to the contrary, negation does not seem to be ambiguous in Strawson's account. The whole issue is connected with the



example below. Suppose the father of Charles II did not exist and consider the following reply to (1):

(17) 'The father of Charles II was not executed, for there is no father of Charles II'.

On the one hand, Strawson might have interpreted (17) as negating that the predicate 'was executed' can be attributed to 'the father of Charles II' on the basis that there is not such a person. This would make negation ambiguous in Strawson's account. For the negation of (1) would involve the following alternative truth-conditions: either i) the father of Charles II exists but the predicate 'was executed' cannot be attributed to such a person; or ii) the father of Charles II does not exist and for this reason the predicate 'was executed' cannot be attributed to such a person. But then this would involve two different presuppositional readings of the negation of a statement. In fact, only alternative 'i' involves the semantic presupposition that the father of Charles II exists. Suppose for example that the statement 'P' semantically presupposes 'Q'. If 'not P' is ambiguous, then under the one reading 'not P' semantically presupposes 'Q'; under the other reading, 'not P' does not semantically presuppose 'Q'. This is an unpalatable result which does not seem to cohere with the spirit of Strawson's account. True, one may argue against my interpretation that, for example, Van Fraassen follows Strawson, and Van Fraassen's account implicitly entails an ambiguity between internal and external negation (Van Fraassen: 1968; 1969; 1970). In reply to this, I would recall that Van Fraassen's motivation is the construction of formal systems which, although originally inspired by, may deviate from, the inexact logic of ordinary language, whereas Strawson's motivation is the accurate description of such a logic. Thus, they may have different accounts of the negation of a sentence.

*either as  
apprehended,  
or as  
attributed.*

On the other hand, Strawson might have interpreted (17) as rejecting the statement that (1) only apparently makes by revealing that its semantic presupposition, namely (11), is false. In this case, (17) would not constitute an authentic negation of (1). For if (11) is false, (1) is no statement at all and cannot be properly negated. Thus, (17) asserts that (1) is not true, but this does not entail that (1) is necessarily false. In the presuppositional account, 'not true' does not always mean 'false'. Since (1) is no statement when (11) is false, (1) is truth-valueless and thus not submitted to the principle of bivalence. This seems to fit better Strawson's claim that it is possible for us to contradict a statement only if we accept its presuppositions (1952: 213). It seems that if the claim is taken literally, the presupposing statement has only one negation<sup>4</sup>. Although Strawson does not deal explicitly with this issue, the non-ambiguous account of negation seems to be the one that coheres best with his account. As a result, as far as the way negation is interpreted, Strawson's account and Russell's are different.

Fifth, consider the language layers involved by the sentence in question. In Russell's case, the assertion made with the sentence has two layers of syntactic structure: the surface and the deep one. The semantic contents of both layers is the same. In Strawson's case, the assertion made with the sentence has two layers of significance. On the one hand, there is the layer corresponding to what is *asserted* by the referring use of the sentence. On the other hand, there is the layer corresponding to what is *presupposed* by the referring use of the sentence. Thus, when we use (1), for example, in the referring way, we are asserting that the father of Charles II was executed and presupposing that there is exactly one father of Charles II.

The above features concern the type sentences used to refer and the presupposing statements yielded. Strawson's approach also entails an important feature concerning the presupposed statements. It is the fact that the existential statements presupposed by subject-predicate statements cannot be taken themselves as subject-predicate statements (1952: 190-1). In fact, Strawson claims that if a statement of the form 'x's exist' is assimilated to any of the four traditional forms, then it would presuppose itself. And we would be led to the absurd situation that such a statement would have a truth-value only if it were true, or that the question whether it had a truth-value would not arise if it were false (id.). This casts a different light on the question whether 'exists' is a predicate or not:

"When we declare or deny that 'there are' things of such-and-such a description, or that things of such-and-such a description 'exist', the use of the quoted phrases *is not to be assimilated either to the predicative or to the referring use of expressions*" (1952: 191; italics mine).

Surprisingly, Strawson's claim about the nature of existential statements has a counterpart in Russell's analysis of propositions of the form 'the so-and-so exists'. For although (1) ['The father of Charles II was executed'] and (6) ['The father of Charles II exists'] have the same superficial grammatical form, their corresponding Russellian paraphrases are different.

Anyway, the above explanation of the referential role of definite descriptions in subject-position is taken by Strawson as a valid alternative to Russell's Theory of Descriptions. Strawson thinks that his account is in closer proximity to ordinary speech, although with some minor reservations. What is more, the account explains in a more natural way the traditional Square of Opposition. As far as the latter is concerned, Strawson believes he is



rejecting an implicit assumption of quantification logic, that is, the assumption that the only genuine subject-predicate statements are statements in the singular; that all other categorical statements are positively or negatively existential (1952: 182).

So far, we know that Strawson's account opposes Russell's in the way it explains the referential function of definite descriptions in subject-position. Strawson claims that such descriptions generate semantic presuppositions with the features above discussed. But the nature of my research requires generalizing the concept of semantic presupposition in a way such that its existence may be investigated in alternative accounts to Strawson's. This situation raises the following question. Is there in fact a general concept of semantic presupposition which may be extracted from Strawson's account? If there is such a concept, then it is the general relation expressed by the concept, and not the Strawsonian instance of it, that originally opposes the Theory of Descriptions. Thus, before I may formulate the problem with which I am concerned in my work, I shall have to discuss the above question. This will be done in the next section.

#### IV - CHARACTERIZATION OF THE GENERAL CONCEPT OF SEMANTIC PRESUPPOSITION: MAIN ASPECTS AND INVOLVEMENTS

In the previous section, the question about the existence of a general concept of semantic presupposition for definite descriptions in subject-position was raised. Now I believe we may infer from the discussion so far that it is in fact possible to construct such a concept. This would be like extracting the consequences of generalizing Strawson's account. Thus, in what follows I shall try to formulate the general concept of semantic presupposition

and then discuss its main features. This does not mean I am taking the concept of semantic presupposition as the correct explanation of the referential role of definite descriptions in subject-position. The fact is that I need to do this in order to characterize clearly the background of the problem that I am going to define in the next section.

From the discussion in the previous section we learn that the relation of semantic presupposition has the following aspects: i) both the Strawsonian statement and its negation have the same semantic presupposition; ii) if the presupposed Strawsonian statement is true, the presupposing statement and its negation have opposite truth-values; iii) if the presupposed Strawsonian statement is false, both the presupposing statement and its negation are not assessable for truth-value; iv) the sense of the presupposing Strawsonian statement does not include the sense of the presupposed statement.

Now the relationship expressed by the general concept of semantic presupposition may be defined as follows. Given that I shall be discussing Frege, Russell, Strawson and Wittgenstein in the next chapters, let 'P' and 'Q' be variables standing for a pair of Fregean thoughts, or Strawsonian statements, or Russellian propositions, or Tractarian propositions or later Wittgensteinian ordinary language statements. Now it is clear that although Fregean thoughts, Strawsonian statements, Russellian propositions, etc. differ from each other, they all share the two following important properties: i) each of them corresponds to the objective contents of the assertion made by means of a declarative sentence; ii) they are all assessable for truth-value. Thus, 'P' and 'Q' are variables related to the above common properties. The twofold requirement for belonging to the domain defined by these variables is to correspond

to the objective contents of an assertion and to be assessable for truth-value<sup>5</sup>. In this case, we may say that 'P' semantically presupposes 'Q' if and only if: i) if 'P' is true, then 'Q' is also true; ii) if the negation of 'P' is true, then 'Q' is also true; iii) whenever 'Q' is true, both 'P' and its negation have a truth-value; iv) whenever 'Q' is false, both 'P' and its negation are truth-valueless. The relation expressed by the general concept of semantic presupposition has the properties described below.

First, the relationship is different from logical entailment<sup>6</sup>. In fact, 'P' entails 'Q' if and only if: i) when 'P' is true, 'Q' must also be true; ii) when 'Q' is false, 'P' must also be false; iii) when 'P' is false, 'Q' may be either true or false. Now the relation of semantic presupposition as above defined differs from entailment in two ways, for if 'P' semantically presupposes 'Q', then when 'Q' is false, 'P' has no truth-value (against (ii)); when 'P' is false, 'Q' must be true (against (iii)). The distinction involved by the general concept may be illustrated by the following example:

(18) 'The King of France is a bachelor'

entails

(19) 'The King of France is a man'

and semantically presupposes

(20) 'There is exactly one King of France'.

Thus, if (19) is false, then (18) is also false, whereas if (20) is false, then (18) has no truth-value; if (18) is false, then (19) may be true or false, whereas (20) must be true. Even so, given that the general concept is a

generalization of Strawson's concept, in both logical entailment and semantic presupposition the Fregean thoughts, or Strawsonian statements, or Russellian propositions, etc. are mentioned and not used.

Second, if 'P' semantically presupposes 'Q' in the sense above defined and 'P' is expressed by a sentence containing a definite description in subject-position, then 'Q' is expressed by a uniquely existential sentence. Of course, there are other ways of defining presupposition, such as the 'sortal' one or the 'factive' one<sup>7</sup>. These alternative ways would involve different kinds of sentences in the definition of the relation of presupposition. But the discussion so far and the problem with which I am concerned allow me to focus the attention only on the kind of existential presupposition above defined.

Third, if 'P' semantically presupposes 'Q', then 'Q' must have a particular logical status which may be characterized by the following features:

i) 'Q' affirms the existence and uniqueness of the object referred to by the description. Therefore, 'Q' is related to an existential sentence containing the description in subject-position. The statement (or thought, or proposition) expressed by the sentence is essentially bivalent and always has a truth-value. For everything of the form 'The F exists uniquely', where 'The F' stands for a definite description, has the interesting property that it is either true or false, even though 'The F' is an expression like 'The green idea'. In addition, as applied to 'Q', all the laws of the classical mathematical logic hold good, because 'Q' is essentially bivalent;

ii) 'Q' has no presuppositions at all: it is the end of the presuppositional chain. This striking property

may be inferred from Strawson's claim that 'Q' cannot be taken as a subject-predicate statement. For if it is assimilated to that form, then it would presuppose itself. This would lead to the absurd that 'Q' would have a truth-value only if it were true, or that the question whether 'Q' had a truth-value would not arise if it were false (1952: 190-1)<sup>8</sup>. The property in question is very important and must belong to the general concept of semantic presupposition.

Fourth, if 'P', 'R', 'S', 'T' and so on are statements (or thoughts, or propositions) expressed by sentences containing the same definite description, say 'The F', in subject-position, then if 'Q' is a statement (or thought, or proposition) expressed by the sentence expressing the existence and uniqueness of the F, 'Q' will be the common semantic presupposition for 'P', 'R', 'S', 'T' and so on. For example, 'The President of USA is married', 'The President of USA is a republican' and 'The President of USA declared war on Iraq' semantically presuppose 'There is exactly one President of USA'.

Fifth, the general presuppositional relation does not entail that the negation of 'P' must be ambiguous in Russell's sense. For the general concept does not need to appeal either to primary or secondary occurrences of the description in subject-position. The fact that 'P' has a truth-value is determined by the fact that 'Q' is true. According to the general concept, the description is an authentic referring expression. Thus, if 'Q' is true, then 'P' will be true or false depending on whether the predicate in 'P' fits or not the object referred to by the description. In addition, the dichotomy determined by the principle of bivalence is not valid in case of presuppositional failure. For if 'Q' is false, then the token sentence involved by 'P' fails to express a statement (proposition) and is neither true nor false.



Although the token sentence may not fail to express a thought, the fact is that both the sentence and the thought will also be neither true nor false. Thus, in case of presuppositional failure, the resulting utterance will be truth-valueless in all cases considered. As for negation, it is worth noticing that 'not true' is not logically equivalent to 'false' here. The equivalence only holds in case of presuppositional success<sup>9</sup>.

The general concept above defined makes two important philosophical assumptions that must be made explicit. The assumptions concern the nature of what is asserted and the sense of an expression without denotation. I shall discuss them in what follows.

The first assumption concerns the fact that the concept requires that there must be a clear cut distinction between what is asserted and what is presupposed when we utter a declarative sentence containing a definite description in subject-position. Thus, suppose I assert

(21) 'the Queen of England is married'.

In this case, the assertion made must include: i) the presupposition that there is one and only one Queen of England; ii) the assertion that the Queen of England has the attribute of being married. The existence and uniqueness of the person referred to by the description 'the Queen of England' are not part of what is asserted by (21). But the ascribing of the predicate 'being married' to the Queen of England does belong to the assertion made by (21). Hence, the assertive use of a sentence like (21) yields two different layers of significance. And this means that statements (or thoughts, or propositions) that semantically presuppose in the above sense have an extra semantic load as compared to statements (or thoughts, or



propositions) that do not presuppose in this sense. This raises the following difficulty: the adherents to the general concept of semantic presupposition have to explain why certain expressions have a greater semantic load than others.

The second philosophical assumption concerns the fact that the general concept of presupposition requires that an expression, or a complete sentence, may have a sense even though it has no denotation. According to both Frege and Strawson, the fact that an expression has no denotation does not necessarily entail that the expression is senseless; and the fact that a sentence involving an empty expression has no denotation does not necessarily entail that the sentence is meaningless either. For example, although sentence (9) contains the empty definite description 'The King of France', (9) still has a sense. It is no coincidence that these authors admit that there may be some domains of discourse in which the sense is more important than the denotation, as in fiction. Although this feature is an important consequence of both their accounts, it raises a difficulty for them: expressions which have a sense but no denotation are awkward, for they are neither true nor false, thus excluding the commitment to strict bivalence.

The adherents to the general concept of semantic presupposition have to face the above difficulties in various degrees, depending upon the particular account which is involved. In the same way, the two following difficulties must be added. First, the relation expressed by the concept is such that it is the *truth* of a statement (thought, proposition) that determines the fact that another statement (thought, proposition) has a *truth-value*. Although this does not seem to yield any contradiction, it appears to involve an awkward circularity. Second, the status of the token sentence when

the presupposed statement (thought, proposition) is false creates a problem for the logician who intends to construct a formal system involving strict bivalence.

For reasons of space, I shall not discuss the above difficulties further. In addition, it will be shown in the next section that my analysis will not require appealing to these difficulties. Anyway, the general concept does not seem to be *prima facie* the better choice as an explanation of the referential role of definite descriptions in subject-position. But given the attraction exerted by the concept on Strawson and other authors, it remains an important alternative model and deserves our attention.

The above considerations exhaust the definition and discussion of the general concept of semantic presupposition I shall need in the course of my work. This takes us to the next step, that is, the attempt to formulate the problem I shall be pursuing in the next chapters. This shall be done in the next section.

#### V - FORMULATION OF THE PROBLEM OF SEMANTIC PRESUPPOSITIONS GENERATED BY DEFINITE DESCRIPTIONS IN SUBJECT-POSITION AND DISCUSSION OF ITS FRAMEWORK

So far, we have seen that Russell suggested that definite descriptions in subject-position are not authentic referring expressions in the sense that after analysis they are replaced by a complex conjunction of propositional functions. By contrast, Strawson suggested that definite descriptions in subject-position are actually authentic referring expressions which yield a true or false statement only if the object referred to by

them exists uniquely (Strawson 1950: 329-30). The existence and uniqueness of the object referred to by the description is not part of what is asserted, but rather semantically presupposed, by the sentence containing the description in subject-position (id.). This in turn suggests the possibility of constructing a general concept of semantic presuppositions generated by definite descriptions in subject-position, of which the Strawsonian account would be an instance.

Now both the Russell/Strawson controversy and the general concept of semantic presupposition raise an interesting problem concerning the referential role of definite descriptions in subject-position. This constitutes what I shall call from now on *the problem of semantic presuppositions generated by definite descriptions in subject-position*. The problem may be characterized on the basis of the following considerations.

First, all the theories discussed so far may be said to have definite descriptions in subject-position as their common field of application. Thus, in order to be precise, I shall restrict and direct my analysis towards the referential task of definite descriptions in subject-position. For the sake of clarity and strict delineation of the subject matter, the consideration of the referential status of whatever expressions which may possibly have functions analogous to those of definite descriptions in subject-position will be excluded here. This notwithstanding, the analysis of the restricted problem will surely have its effects upon the way other related expressions refer or presuppose.

Second, according to Strawson, the point of controversy between himself and Russell may be characterized by the following question:

"Given an utterance which suffers from radical reference-failure, are we to say that what we have here is just one special case of false statement or are we to say that our statement suffers from a deficiency so radical as to deprive it of the chance of being either true or false?" (1964: 82).

I have no doubt this is an excellent formulation of the point of disagreement between Strawson and Russell. But it is not the adequate formulation of the purpose of my work, that is, the problem of semantic presuppositions generated by definite descriptions in subject-position. Even so, Strawson's wording may serve as a reference for the formulation of my own problem. In this spirit, I may say that, for my purpose, his wording is simultaneously too narrow and too wide a formulation of the problem. On the one hand, it is too narrow because it seems to include only the logical status of an utterance suffering from radical reference-failure. On the other hand, it is too wide a formulation of the problem because it allows the inclusion of sentences which may not have definite descriptions in the subject-position. What is more, Strawson's question assumes the previous existence of alternative theoretical explanations for the referential behaviour of definite descriptions. Thus, what he characterizes as being at stake is in fact a mere issue concerning the application of these previously elaborated Theories. The more general issue concerning a rational choice between the alternative Theories themselves must be included in the question so that we can grasp the essentials of the problem.

Thus, an adequate formulation of the problem of semantic presuppositions generated by definite descriptions in subject-position needs to satisfy the following requirements. First, the formulation should not be so narrow as to include only the logical status of utterances suffering from radical reference-failure. Second, it should not be so wide as to include the problem

of presuppositions of expressions which are not definite descriptions or cannot be replaced by a description. Third, it must account for the existence of alternative Theories which may explain the referential phenomena involved and which may have a wider scope than the one determined by the present issue.

Besides, the previous discussion of the general concept of semantic presupposition in the present chapter provides us with the necessary clues for a more accurate characterization of the problem. These clues are: i) although the underlying motivations of the alternative solutions are different, their common field of application clearly includes definite descriptions; ii) the alternative solutions involve different attempts to explain, logically and philosophically, the referential task of definite descriptions.

As a result, the problem of semantic presuppositions generated by definite descriptions in subject-position may be formulated as follows: *does a definite description in the subject-position of a declarative sentence yield a statement (or proposition, or thought) that semantically presupposes the statement (or proposition, or thought) that the object referred to by the description exists uniquely in the sense of the general concept previously defined?* The problem may be understood as a complex question concerning the way definite descriptions function in language. An adequate answer to such a question requires a clear explanation of the following sub-questions: i) whether descriptions yield statements (thoughts, propositions) that semantically presuppose or not; ii) if descriptions do not yield statements (thoughts, propositions) that semantically presuppose, then: ii<sub>a</sub>) how do they actually function?; ii<sub>b</sub>) what are the logical and philosophical requirements for a non-presuppositional account of the referential task of



statements (thoughts, propositions) containing descriptions in subject-position?; iii) if descriptions do yield statements (thoughts, propositions) that semantically presuppose, then: iii<sub>a</sub>) how do they generate the semantic presuppositions involved?; iii<sub>b</sub>) what are the logical requirements for a consistent elaboration of the concept of semantic presuppositions generated by descriptions?; iii<sub>c</sub>) what are the philosophical requirements for a consistent elaboration of the concept of semantic presuppositions generated by descriptions? Of course, there are many other related questions, but the above may be taken to be the basic ones.

Although the starting point of the problem just defined is the Russell/Strawson controversy, other factors are involved in its discussion. This is so because the Theory of Descriptions and the Theory of Presuppositions are not the only alternatives to the explanation of the referential role of definite descriptions in subject-position. In fact, the problem is complicated by the intersection of the concepts of semantic and pragmatic presupposition. This requires that I make explicit the conceptual framework to which I shall be appealing in the course of my work. In what follows, I shall make a brief analysis of the relationships between semantic and pragmatic presupposition and their connexions with the problem above defined in order to clarify my assumptions in this field.

According to Morris, semantics is the part of the general theory of signs (semiotics) which studies the relationships between the signs and the objects they apply to (Morris 1938). Semantics differs from syntax because the latter studies the relationships between the signs themselves, independently of the objects designated by the signs (id.). There are many other definitions of semantics, but as far as the above problem is concerned,



a definition of semantics as the study of meaning, the main concern of which are concepts like truth, designation, fulfilment (of conditions), definition, naming, sense, and so on, will do. Thus, one of the basic features of semantics is that it deals with signs and their denotations in abstraction from the speakers and the contexts of use. I would suggest that in my work such a feature may be used as a criterion for determining whether a relationship is in fact semantic or not. On the basis of this criterion, I may claim that semantics is different from syntax, that is, the study of signs and their relations in abstraction from denotations, speakers and contexts of use. For the denotations are excluded here.

As for pragmatics, Morris defines it as the part of semiotics that studies the relation between the signs and their interpreters (Morris 1938: 6). The interpreters are the speakers and the hearers of the language. Following Morris' suggestion, I would say that pragmatics may be defined as the study of the uses the speakers make of the expressions and sentences of language in different contexts. Thus, one of the basic features of pragmatics is that it adds the consideration of speakers and contexts to the analysis of sentences and expressions. From this point of view, Bar-Hillel's claim that pragmatics is concerned with the interpretation of indexical expressions (Bar-Hillel 1954) is mistaken. For the interpretation of indexical expressions undoubtedly involves the consideration of their truth-conditions, and such a consideration belongs to semantics. The same applies to Montague's definition of pragmatics as an interpretation of indexical sentences (Montague 1972). In making this claim, I am following Kempson (1975: 137).

Now given the above definitions of syntax, semantics and pragmatics, it is clear that the concept of presupposition of which the general framework has been

expounded in a previous section is a semantic one. For the concept in question expresses the truth-conditions of a statement (thought, proposition) by means of a relationship between statements (thoughts, propositions) in abstraction from the speakers and the contexts of use. Therefore, the relation of semantic presupposition goes beyond syntax in virtue of its concern with denotations and truth-conditions; it does not go up to pragmatics in virtue of the abstraction it makes from speakers and contexts.

The incorporation of the concept of semantic presupposition into logic and linguistic considerations raises a problem. In fact, there is always the caveat that the relationship seems to require a three-valued logic. If the concept is incorporated into logic and linguistics, it follows that the logic of ordinary language is no longer two-valued, but is to be replaced by a three-value presuppositional logic. Although our linguistic intuitions cannot be considered the final court of appeal in order to decide issues like the one I am analyzing, this seems to be counter-intuitive enough to require further explanation by the adherents to the general concept of semantic presupposition.

In the light of the above framework, the following three main views as regards the referential role of descriptions in subject-position have developed. Although most accounts of semantic presupposition are versions of the Strawsonian concept, there are alternative pragmatic concepts.

First, there is the Strawsonian view represented by the Theory of Semantic Presupposition. The basic feature of this view is the acceptance of the presuppositional relation as an adequate explanation of the referring role of definite descriptions in subject-

position. But this view may be subdivided into two groups: one considers that radical reference-failure falls outside of the scope of logic, whereas the other includes radical reference-failure within that scope. The former group is chiefly represented by Strawson<sup>10</sup> and, as it will be shown in the next chapter, Frege<sup>11</sup>. The latter is represented by Van Fraassen (1968; 1969; 1971) and Lambert (1962; 1964)<sup>12</sup>. These authors have developed what they call free description theories, that is, formal systems including definite descriptions in a way such that: i) against Russell, expressions of the form 'the so-and-so' are interpreted as authentic referring expressions: ii) against Frege, nothing is assigned in the domain of discourse to those cases in which the description fails to be true of exactly one object (Lambert 1972: 184). All the free description theories add to a free logic, that is, a certain first order theory with identity, the following axiom<sup>13</sup>:

$$(22) \quad '(x)[(x=(ix)Fx) \leftrightarrow (Fx \& (y)(Fy \rightarrow y=x))]',$$

or any equivalent expression. According to Lambert, (22) is an important distinguishing principle, for it fails to hold in any Fregean system in which an empty description has to stand for the null class (Lambert 1972: 184).

Second, there is the view represented by the Pragmatic Theories of Presupposition. The basic feature of this view is that presuppositions derive from previous knowledge and beliefs involved in the communication between speakers and hearers. Thus, the presuppositional relation involved by the use of descriptions in subject-position is no longer a relation between the presupposing and the presupposed statements, but a relation between the speaker and his utterance. The pragmatic view usually explains presupposition in terms of contextual factors, background knowledge and beliefs

involved, Gricean conversational principles or notions from speech act theory. Although differing from the Theory of Semantic Presupposition, the pragmatic account undoubtedly arose from the theories of Frege and Strawson, because both authors introduce presupposition by means of a fundamental distinction between the asserted and the presupposed (Van der Sandt 1988: 8; 23-4).

The pragmatic view also admits a subdivision into two main groups. Authors belonging to the first group usually define presupposition as the set of conditions for the "correct" (or whatever equivalent) use of linguistic expressions. For example, Sellars (1954) defines as 'correct' the utterance of a sentence of which the speaker believes the presuppositions are true. In the case of definite descriptions in subject-position, to say that an utterance of 'the King of France is bald' presupposes 'There is exactly one King of France' is to say that it is correct to assert the conjunction 'there is exactly one King of France and he is bald' only if the speaker believes there to be exactly one King of France and that this belief is shared by the hearer. Thus, if the hearer replies that 'the King of France is bald' is false, he also presupposes that the uniqueness condition is satisfied. And even though both the original utterance and the reply presuppose that the King of France exists uniquely, the utterance is false if such a uniqueness condition is not satisfied (Sellars 1954: 207-8)<sup>14</sup>.

Authors of the second group usually define presupposition in terms of the Gricean 'implicature'. Grice (1978) remarks that the total information of an utterance may be divided in two different ways: firstly, into what is said and what is implicated; secondly, into what belongs to the conventional meaning of the utterance and what does not. Thus, the total information conveyed by a given utterance may have three different dimensions:

what is said; what is conventionally implicated; what is non-conventionally implicated (Grice 1978: 113). Earlier, Grice called what is conventionally implicated and what is non-conventionally implicated 'conventional implicatures' and 'non-conventional implicatures' respectively. As he puts it,

"In some cases the conventional meaning of the words used will determine what is implicated, besides helping to determine what is said. If I say (smugly), He is an Englishman; he is, therefore, brave, I have certainly committed myself, by virtue of the meaning of my words, to its being the case that his being brave is a consequence of (follows from) his being an Englishman. But while I have said that he is an Englishman, and said that he is brave, I do not want to say that I have SAID (in the favoured sense) that it follows from his being an Englishman that he is brave, though I have certainly indicated, and so implicated, that this is so. I do not want to say that my utterance of this sentence would be, STRICTLY SPEAKING, false should the consequence in question fail to hold (Grice 1975: 44-5).

As for the non-conventional implicatures, they are linked to the conversational 'cooperative principle' which is to be obeyed both by the speaker and the hearer: 'make your informative contribution in accordance with the requirements of the conversation'. To the cooperative principle is subordinated a set of rules which are called by Grice 'conversational maxims' (Grice 1975: 45-7; 48 ff.). The most important subclass of non-conventional implicatures is what Grice calls 'conversational implicatures'. Thus,

"A man who, by (in, when) saying (or making as if to say) that p has implicated that q, may be said to have conversationally implicated that q, PROVIDED THAT (1) he is to be presumed to be observing the conversational maxims, or at least the cooperative principle; (2) the supposition that he is aware that, or thinks that, q is required in order to make his saying or making as if to say p (or doing so in THOSE terms) consistent with his presumption; and (3) the speaker thinks (and would expect the hearer to think that the speaker thinks) that it is within the



competence of the hearer to work out, or grasp intuitively, that the supposition mentioned in (2) IS required (Grice 1975: 49-50).

Given the above Gricean conceptual framework, most of the authors belonging to the second group consider the notion of 'presupposition' to be either explicable in terms of Gricean principles or replaceable by the concept of implicature. For example, Kempson tries to show that Grice's framework can provide an adequate explanation of the phenomena which both logicians and linguists have labelled 'presupposition' (Kempson 1975: 138). Thus, her explanation of the functioning of non-anaphoric definite descriptions in subject-position depends upon three factors characteristic of implicatures: i) the prior specification of the linguistic system; ii) the Gricean cooperative principle, its conversational maxims, and the Gricean pragmatic definition of meaning; iii) a deduction process by means of the conversational maxims in the face of an apparent violation of them (Kempson 1975: 181). And she thinks the implicatures involved in this case are general conversational implicatures (id.)<sup>15</sup>.

At this point, it is worth noticing that the semantic and the pragmatic accounts of presupposition, although they are different, may be put together within a wider theoretical account. As Van der Sandt correctly observes, one might relate these views by appealing either to Grice's theory of conversation or to Searle's speech act theory. In fact, suppose that the statement 'P' semantically presupposes the statement 'Q'. In this case, according to Searle's sincerity condition (Searle 1969: 66-7) or to Grice's maxim of quality (Grice 1975: 46), the assertion of 'P' in whatever context requires that the speaker believes 'P' and its obvious entailments, such as 'Q'; otherwise, the assertion would be defective. Therefore, a semantic presupposition of a statement made by means of a sentence may require the conjunction with a





pragmatic presupposition of the user of the sentence. But the converse does not hold, that is, a pragmatic presupposition of the user of the sentence does not necessarily require the conjunction with a semantic presupposition of the statement made by means of the sentence. For if an utterance of a sentence is defective, that does not necessarily effect the truth-value of the assertion made by means of the sentence (Van der Sandt 1988: 26). A similar suggestion was previously made by Stalnaker (1970: 279).

Third and finally, there is the view represented by those who think that the concept of semantic presupposition is mistaken. The basic feature of this view is the refusal to admit the concept of presupposition as a coherent concept of logical theory. Thus, according to this view, any attempt to recur to the notion of semantic presupposition in order to explain the referential function of definite descriptions in the subject-position of declarative sentences is doomed to fail. The most important representative of this view is still Russell. Other important adherents to the anti-presuppositionalist view are M. Dummett (1978: xv-xix; 1-24; 25-8) and G. Evans (1982: 51-60).

It is important to recall that the above three main views as regards the semantic presuppositions of descriptions admit of some overlapping. For example, as already mentioned, in order to explain some logico-linguistic phenomena one might recur both to the concept of semantic and of pragmatic presupposition without contradiction; alternatively, one might firmly adhere to Russell's Theory of Descriptions and at the same time recur to the concept of pragmatic presupposition for sentences containing indexicalised descriptions. The only major restriction involved here seems to be the contradiction which would arise on the simultaneous

adoption of both the Theory of Presuppositions and the Theory of Descriptions in order to explain the referential behaviour of non-indexicalised definite descriptions in subject-position.

So far, the following important step has been taken in the course of my work. On the basis of the Russell/Strawson controversy, the problem of semantic presuppositions generated by definite descriptions in subject-position is formulated, the framework involved is made explicit and the main features of the possible views on the problem are outlined.

Now given the importance of Wittgenstein to contemporary thought, the basic question with which I am concerned in my work is to check whether or not he has an answer to the above defined problem both in the early and in the later philosophy. In other words, I shall be trying to answer the following questions in the course of my work: i) according to the "Tractatus", *do definite descriptions in the subject-position of declarative sentences yield propositions that semantically presuppose the existence and uniqueness of the object referred to by the descriptions in the sense of the general concept previously defined?* ii) according to the "Investigations", *do definite descriptions in the subject-position of declarative sentences yield statements that semantically presuppose the existence and uniqueness of the object referred to by the descriptions in the sense of the general concept previously defined?* To give an answer to these questions will involve giving answers to the sub-questions above mentioned in the case of Wittgenstein's philosophies. At this point, it is worth recalling that the above questions are in harmony with the main purpose of my work, that is, neither to offer an account of semantic presupposition nor to discuss the difficulties raised by such a relation, but simply to analyze the early

and the later Wittgenstein's answers to the question about semantic presuppositions generated by definite descriptions in subject-position.

## VI - FINAL REMARKS

In this chapter, I stressed the importance of the problem concerning the referential role of definite descriptions in subject-position. The relevant aspects of Russell's solution to the problem and Strawson's alternative one were discussed. The analysis of Strawson's concept allowed the construction of a general concept of semantic presupposition to be used in the analysis of Wittgenstein's early and later solution. The general concept was also used to formulate the problem with which I shall be concerned in the course of my work. The framework of the problem and some of its possible solutions were discussed, thus clearing the path for the posterior discussion.

Once this is done, it would seem we might now turn our attention to Wittgenstein. But before we do this, there must be some discussion to do with definite descriptions in subject-position and some aspects of the views of Frege, Russell and Strawson on what is involved. This will be done in the next chapter.

## NOTES

1. In reality, Russell's paraphrase of (1) in "On Denoting" is: "It is not always false of x that x begot Charles II and that x was executed and that 'if y begot Charles II, y is identical with x' is always true of y" (1905: 482). Although this is equivalent to (2), I chose the latter in virtue of its being closer to contemporary terminology.

2. I owe this formulation to Wolfram (1989: 42).

3. The analysis that follows is inspired by Sainsbury (1979: 117-22).

4. Even though (17) is interpreted as an external negation of (1), it would be a negation in virtue of reasons which are different from Russell's. For it would be an external negation in virtue of the falsity of the presupposed statement, not in virtue of primary or secondary occurrences of the description.

5. On the basis of Lemmon (1966), Lewis (1972) and Davidson (1967), Kempson believes that sentences also do have a truth value relative to some context of utterance (1975: 38). Thus, she argues that it is legitimate to speak of semantic presuppositions of sentences (1975: 51-2). She does so because she adheres to an account of meaning in terms of truth-conditions. But this involves some difficulties as regards handling the truth conditions of deictic sentences. As I am not committed to an account of meaning in terms of truth-conditions, I shall stick to the claim that only statements, not sentences, can have a truth-value.

6. For reasons of space, I shall not consider the controversy on the question whether or not presupposition is a logical relationship different from entailment. On this subject, see, for example, Nelson (1946); Strawson (1948); Barker (1956); Hancock (1960); Peterson (1960); Nehrlich (1967); Roberts (1969); Montague (1969); Linsky (1971); Donnell (1972); Kane (1972); Nelkin (1972); Cooper (1974: 34 ff.).

7. In this respect, see, for example, Martin (1979: 15 ff.).

8. In other words, if 'P' presupposes 'Q', then 'Q' has a logical form which is different from 'P's and has no presuppositions. It is worth noticing that Russell's argument goes the opposite way: if 'not Q' has no presuppositions, then, by parity of form between 'P' and

'Q', 'P' has no presuppositions either. As it may be inferred from Russell's words: "Indeed, it seems to me evident that the judgement 'there is no such object as the round square' does not presuppose that there is such an object. If this is admitted, however, we are led to the conclusion that, by parity of form, no judgement concerning 'the so-and-so' actually involves the so-and-so as a constituent" (1976: 162).

9. It would be possible to construct an alternative general concept of semantic presupposition in which negation is ambiguous. Call it 'n-presupposition'. It might be defined in a way such that it shares all the previous features with the general concept of semantic presupposition I am characterizing so far. As for negation, the n-presupposition would be as follows. If 'P' is an assertion made by means of a sentence containing a definite description in subject-position, then the negation of such a sentence may be interpreted in either of the following ways: i) as an external negation of the fact expressed by the whole sentence; ii) as an internal negation of the predicate ascribed to the description in subject-position. Consider, for example, the following sentences:

(9a) 'The King of France is not bald',

and

(9b) 'The King of France is not bald, because there is no King of France'.

(9a) may be interpreted in either of the two following ways: i) it assumes that there is a King of France and negates that he is bald; ii) it negates that there is a King of France who is bald. (9b), in turn, negates that there is a King of France who is bald. The existence of a complex form such as the one of (9b) seems to be a confirmation of the possibility of the above two interpretations for the negation of 'The King of France is bald'. Thus, the ambiguity of negation depends upon whether the referring expression in subject-position is empty or not. If the referring expression is non-empty, the predicate is denied of the reference of the expression (internal negation); if the expression is empty, the predicate cannot be denied of the reference of the expression, but the entire sentence may be denied (external negation).

But this yields the unpalatable consequence that the positive form of (9a), that is, 'The King of France is bald' may also be interpreted in either of the two following ways: i) it asserts of the referent of 'The King of France' that he is bald; ii) it asserts the existence of a King of France who is bald. Under interpretation (i), (9a) semantically presupposes the existence and uniqueness



of the King of France; under interpretation (ii), however, (9b) is existential and has no presuppositions.

The above consequence leads some authors to deny strongly the ambiguity of negation. For example, Kempson thinks the claim that negation is ambiguous is wrong. She argues that the incorporation into natural-language semantics of an additional denial operator has some awkward consequences (Kempson 1970: 95-100).

In my opinion, the above discussion reveals that it is more likely that Strawson's account does not entail ambiguity of negation. But it is worth noticing that I am only stating what seems to be an important property of the general concept of semantic presupposition, and not defending the concept. To evaluate the problematic concept of semantic presupposition is not my concern here.

10. Austin (1962: 14 ff.; 50-1; 52; 131; 136) formulates the same view, but in terms of speech acts theory. This is an illustration of the fact that the above division into three main views on presupposition is not, and does not intend to be, either comprehensive or exhaustive.

11. See next chapter.

12. On this subject, see Van der Sandt (1988: 8; 13-49; 50-86), from which most of the general information given in this Section is extracted and adapted. He calls those, who attempt to formalize the concept of presupposition, 'neo-Strawsonians'. Some of the authors he quotes, as examples of this trend, are: Keenan (1972), Hausser (1976), and Blau (1978) (van der Sandt 1988: 13).

13. For convenience, I shall adopt from now on the following adapted notation: dots will be replaced by the brackets '(' and ')'; 'E' will stand for the inverted 'E'; '-->' for the horseshoe; '<-->' for equivalence; 'i' for the inverted iota; '&' for conjunction; 'v' for non-exclusive disjunction; '-' for negation.

14. As a matter of fact, Sellars argument is applied to a definite description containing an indexical ('the table over here'). But I believe his account may be adapted to the case of a definite description without indexicals. Sellars also argues that Strawson confuses ellipsis with indexicality and thus assimilates descriptions to indexical expressions. For example, 'the table is large' in fact means something like 'the table over here is large' (Sellars 1954: 198-201). In his "Mr. Strawson on Referring", Russell seems to admit that a definite description containing indexicals has semantic presuppositions in Strawson's sense (Russell 1957: 120).

As other examples of authors adhering to the



pragmatic view, van der Sandt quotes: Karttunen (1973), who appeals to the term 'sincere', and later on to the term 'felicitous' (1974); Thomason (1977), who uses 'acceptable'; Fillmore (1969) and Stalnaker (1973), who use 'appropriate' (van der Sandt 1988: 25).

15. According to van der Sandt, Sadock (1978) and Karttunen & Peters (1979) consider that presupposition is reducible to the notion of 'conventional implicature' (van der Sandt 1988: 70); Kempson (1975), Wilson (1975), Boer and Lycan (1976), Atlas (1977) and Grice (1981) consider that presuppositions are part of the entailments of simple sentences, and invoke the Gricean theory of conversation in order to explain how presuppositions are preserved in embeddings that usually do not preserve entailments (van der Sandt 1988: 70; 76).

## CHAPTER 2

### FREGE, RUSSELL, AND STRAWSON ON SEMANTIC PRESUPPOSITIONS GENERATED BY DEFINITE DESCRIPTIONS IN SUBJECT-POSITION

#### I - PRELIMINARY REMARKS

The analysis of Wittgenstein's solution to the problem of semantic presuppositions generated by definite descriptions in subject-position requires the prior consideration of some important aspects in Frege's, Russell's and Strawson's views. In this chapter, I shall deal with these aspects in the following way. First, I shall argue that Frege held the view that definite descriptions in subject-position generate what may be called semantic 'prerequisites'. Second, I shall try to prove that the Fregean semantic 'prerequisites' generated by definite descriptions are in fact semantic presuppositions in the sense of the general concept defined in the previous chapter. Third, I shall argue that Frege's concept of semantic presupposition entails that the expressions he calls 'proper names' play two distinct referential roles in language. Fourth, on the basis of the twofold referential function suggested by Frege, I shall argue that Russellian logically proper names and definite descriptions which generate semantic presuppositions when in subject-position are not incompatible. Thus, Strawson's criticism of Russell in "On Referring" will be revealed to be mistaken. Fifth and finally, I shall argue that, as far as the accounts discussed are concerned, we may draw the conclusion that the dispute is undecidable at the purely

semantic level. The whole discussion is intended to prepare the field for asking what would be Wittgenstein's early and later solution to the problem of semantic presupposition generated by definite descriptions in subject-position.

## II - FREGE'S CONCEPT OF A 'PREREQUISITE' GENERATED BY DEFINITE DESCRIPTIONS IN SUBJECT-POSITION

In his challenge to the Theory of Descriptions, Strawson seems to have revived a Fregean concept of semantic presupposition. In fact, there are strong indications that Frege held a view which is similar to Strawson's. So, some discussion of the relevant aspects of the Fregean semantics is needed. This will take us back to Frege's famous 1892 paper "On Sense and Reference". In this section, I shall analyze a particular semantic relation which is expounded in that paper.

Consider the Fregean analysis of the sentence

(1) 'Whoever discovered the elliptic form of the planetary orbits died in misery'.

According to Frege, it contains the clause

(2) 'Whoever discovered the elliptic form of the planetary orbits'

which has a reference, that is, designates an object, only if a certain sentence is true (Frege 1892a: 69). The sentence the truth of which is a condition of (2)'s having a reference is:

(3) 'There was someone who discovered the elliptic

form of the planetary orbits' (id.).

Frege claims that the sense of (3) is not included in the sense of (1) (1892a: 69-70). In addition, the truth of (3) is a precondition not only for the subordinate clause (2) to have a reference, but also for sentence (1) to have a truth-value. These features define a semantic relation involving subordinate clauses, sentences containing these clauses and their Fregean references. I shall call it the Fregean relation of *semantic prerequisite*. In doing this, I am following Geach and Black's suggestion in their somewhat free translation of Frege's text<sup>1</sup>.

If the above interpretation is correct, the Fregean relation of semantic prerequisite may also be applied to the explanation of the referential task of definite descriptions in subject-position. True, in "On Sense and Reference", Frege does not deal explicitly with the semantic prerequisites generated by definite descriptions in subject-position. Instead, he analyses the prerequisites generated by noun clauses like (2); he then passes on to the prerequisites of adjectival, adverbial, and conditional clauses (1892a: 70-1). But the existence of the relationship of semantic prerequisite in the case of sentences containing definite descriptions in subject-position may be inferred from Frege's treatment of some of the above clauses.

First, consider the case of noun clauses. It may be shown that some noun clauses can be expressed by means of definite descriptions. Suppose the description

(4) 'The discoverer of the elliptic form of the planetary orbits'

which may occupy the subject-position in the sentence

(5) 'The discoverer of the elliptic form of the planetary orbits died in misery'.

In conformity with the pattern of the above analysis of (1), we may say that (5) has the semantic prerequisite

(6) 'There is a discoverer of the elliptic form of the planetary orbits'.

On the basis of the above example, I feel at ease to suggest the point that there are noun clauses which have the form of definite descriptions such that, when they occupy the subject-position, they may generate sentences that have semantic prerequisites in the sense above defined.

Second, consider the case of adjectival clauses. Frege's analysis reveals they can be used to construct compound proper names, but in a peculiar way. Adjectival clauses function as grammatical adjectives, and for this reason they only form part of the noun clause; they yield a complete noun clause only when they are linked to another expression. Frege's example of an adjectival clause is

(7) 'which is smaller than 0'.

According to Frege, (7) cannot express a complete thought and have a reference by itself. In fact, its sense can only be part of a thought and its reference cannot be an independent object. But the clause can be part of the following compound proper name:

(8) 'the square root of 4 which is smaller than 0'.

In some cases, with the help of a single adjective, one may construct an expression having the same reference as



(8). For instance, in the adequate numerical system, (8) is equivalent to

(9) 'the negative square root of 4'.

In his analysis of adjectival clauses, Frege also makes an important and explicit qualification about definite descriptions:

"Adjective clauses also serve to construct compound proper names, though, unlike noun clauses, they are not sufficient by themselves for this purpose. These adjective clauses are to be regarded as equivalent to adjectives. Instead of 'the square root of 4 which is smaller than 0', one can also say 'the negative square root of 4'. We have here the case of a compound proper name constructed from the expression with the help of the singular definite article. This is at any rate permissible *if the concept applies to one and only one single object*" (1892a: 70-1; italics mine).

Here, the definite description is taken as a referring expression which is constructed with the help of the word 'the'. And Frege clearly states that the use of this word requires not only that the object referred to exists, but also that it be unique. The same requirement of existence and uniqueness is explicitly formulated in Frege's paper on "Negation":

"The definite article 'the' in the expression

'the negation of the thought that 3 is greater than 5'

shows that this expression is meant to designate a definite single thing. This single thing is in our case a thought. The definite article makes the whole expression into a singular name, a proxy for a proper name" (Frege 1977: 50).

As a result, (6) should be more rigorously rendered as

(9) 'There is exactly one discoverer of the elliptic

form of the planetary orbits'.

Now turn to (8) and (9). Both are definite descriptions. Although Frege does not offer any example of semantic presuppositions generated by them, I believe I may easily suggest one. Consider the sentence

(10) 'the square root of 4 which is smaller than 0 is a real number'.

If we adapt Frege's analysis of (1) to the case of (10), we shall find that (10) has the semantic prerequisite

(11) 'there is exactly one thing which is the square root of 4 which is smaller than 0'.

All adjectival clauses like (7) have the same features. If this is correct, the above analysis reveals that adjectival clauses may be used to construct definite descriptions which generate semantic prerequisites when in subject-position<sup>2</sup>.

The claim that in Frege's view definite descriptions in subject-position generate semantic prerequisites is consistent with some of his hints concerning the features of definite descriptions in "On Sense and Reference". The first hint is that empty definite descriptions are expressions having a sense but no reference. As an example, he offers the description

(18) 'the least rapidly convergent series' (1892a: 58).

He also offers some examples of empty definite descriptions outside the strict domain of mathematics, such as:

(19) 'the celestial body most distant from earth'  
(1892a: 58),

and

(20) 'the will of the people' (1892a: 70).

More precisely, Frege argues that (18) has a sense, but demonstrably has no reference (1892a: 58); that (19) has a sense, but hardly has a reference (id.); and that it is easy to establish that (20) has no generally accepted reference (1892a: 70). Now the relation of semantic prerequisite as defined in Frege's case requires that some expressions may have a sense but no reference. For when there is a prerequisite failure, that is, when the sentence being the semantic prerequisite is false, the sentence having the prerequisite must still have a sense, although it has no reference. And the way to obtain this is to construct the sentence in question by means of expressions which have a sense but no reference. From the first Fregean hint, it is clear that empty definite descriptions belong to the class of expressions which can have a sense but no reference, thus being valid candidates for generating semantic prerequisites when in subject-position.

The second hint is the fact that Frege offers an example of an empty description in connexion with his discussion about the causes of the existence of semantic prerequisites generated by noun clauses (1892a: 70). After analyzing the case of noun clause (2) ['Whoever discovered the elliptic form of the planetary orbits'], Frege argues that the existence of expressions of this kind, that is, expressions which have a reference only if a correlated sentence is true, arises from an imperfection of language. He then claims that a logically perfect language can avoid this by the stipulation that combinations of symbols that

seem to stand for something but have no reference should stand for the number 0 (id.). In the discussion that follows, Frege offers the previously mentioned definite description (20) ['The will of the people'] as an example of such empty combinations of symbols (id.). Thus, once again we may infer that in Frege's view a definite description in subject-position generates semantic prerequisites.

So far, we know that Frege held a view that some expressions in subject-position generate semantic prerequisites and that definite descriptions are a subset of such expressions. In what follows, I shall argue that the Fregean semantic prerequisite is in fact a kind of semantic presupposition.

### III - FREGE'S CONCEPT OF A 'PREREQUISITE' IS AN INSTANCE OF THE GENERAL CONCEPT OF SEMANTIC PRESUPPOSITION

In this section, I shall argue that the Fregean semantic 'prerequisite' above discussed is an instance of the general concept of semantic presupposition which was abstracted from Strawson's account.

As already mentioned, there are strong indications that Frege held a view of semantic presupposition. This may be illustrated by an interesting 1975 paper entitled "Frege's Polymorphous Concept of Presupposition and its Role in a Theory of Meaning", in which Jay Atlas extracts not only one, but *three* different notions of presupposition from Frege's "On Sense and Reference". Among such notions, Atlas distinguishes a Fregean *semantic presupposition* which he characterizes as a relationship between thoughts (Atlas 1975: 29). The

source of the concept is the following Fregean passage:

"The sense of the sentence 'After Schleswig-Holstein was separated from Denmark, Prussia and Austria quarrelled' can also be rendered in the form 'After the separation of Schleswig-Holstein from Denmark, Prussia and Austria quarrelled'. In this version, it is surely sufficiently clear that the sense is not to be taken as having as a part the thought that Schleswig-Holstein was once separated from Denmark, but that this is the necessary presupposition in order for the expression 'after the separation of Schleswig-Holstein from Denmark' to have any reference at all. To be sure, our sentence can also be interpreted as saying that Schleswig-Holstein was once separated from Denmark. We then have a case which is to be considered later. In order to understand the difference more clearly, let us project ourselves into the mind of a Chinese who, having little knowledge of European history, believes it to be false that Schleswig-Holstein was ever separated from Denmark. He will take our sentence, in the first version, to be neither true nor false but will deny it to have any reference, on the ground of absence of reference for its subordinate clause. This clause would only apparently determine a time" (Frege 1892a: 71; Atlas 1975: 30)<sup>5</sup>.

According to Atlas' reading of Frege, the above paragraph brings out Frege's semantic notion of presupposition (1975: 30). Atlas argues that the existence of a temporal reference for the adverbial clause

(21) 'After the separation of Schleswig-Holstein from Denmark'

semantically presupposes

(22) 'Schleswig-Holstein was once separated from Denmark'.

Atlas claims that the thought expressed by a sentence containing (21) will have a truth-value only if the presupposed thought expressed by (22) is true. And this is equivalent to the relation of semantic presupposition in



the sense previously defined by Atlas: the thought 'P' semantically presupposes the thought 'Q' if and only if the truth of 'Q' is a necessary condition of 'P''s having a truth-value (Atlas 1975: 29; 30).

As far as the relation of semantic presupposition is concerned, I think Atlas' reading of Frege is right. But in conformity with the purpose of my work I would add two important qualifications.

First, the Fregean relation of semantic presupposition spotted by Atlas is an instance of the general concept of semantic presupposition. In fact, the relation is semantic, for it only involves thoughts and their truth-values. In addition, suppose two thoughts, say 'P' and 'Q'. If the truth of 'Q' is a necessary condition of 'P''s having a truth-value, we may say that both 'P' and 'not P' semantically presuppose 'Q' in the sense of the general concept. For if 'P' is true, then 'P' has a truth-value and this means 'Q' is true; if 'not P' is true, then 'P' is false, that is, has a truth-value and this means that 'Q' is true; the same holds if 'P' or its negation is false<sup>4</sup>. As a result, it seems reasonable to assume that 'P' semantically presupposes 'Q' in Atlas' reading if and only if: i) if 'P' is true or false, then 'Q' is true; ii) if 'not P' is false or true, then 'Q' is true; iii) if 'Q' is true, then 'P' will be either true or false and 'not P' will be either false or true; iv) if 'Q' is false, then neither 'P' nor its negation will have a truth-value. In analogy with Strawson's case, the status of the "thought" in (iv) is difficult to determine. For the falsity of 'Q' would involve the commitment to paradoxical truth-valueless "thoughts". Therefore, I would claim that the relation spotted by Atlas in Frege is an instance of the general concept of semantic presupposition as defined in the previous chapter.

The second qualification to be made is the following. I would add to Atlas' reading the important fact that in Frege's view definite descriptions in subject-position may also be shown to generate semantic presuppositions in the sense above defined. This may be inferred from Frege's analysis of the referential role of subordinate clauses in "On Sense and Reference". I shall argue that, although Frege does not use the word 'presupposition' in his analysis of the referential role of subordinate clauses and adopts a different phrasing, the relation involved is equivalent to semantic presupposition.

There is a striking similarity between the relation of semantic prerequisite in the case of thoughts expressed by sentences containing subordinate clauses and the relation of semantic presupposition in the case of thoughts expressed by sentences containing adverbial clauses. Consider, for example, sentences (5) ['The discoverer of the elliptic form of the planetary orbits died in misery'] and (9) ['There is exactly one discoverer of the elliptic form of the planetary orbits']. In fact, both (5) and its negation entail (9) in the sense that the truth of (9) is a necessary condition of (5)'s having a truth-value; if (9) is true, then (5) and its negation have opposite truth-values; if (9) is false, then neither (5) nor its negation have a truth-value. This allows the conclusion that (5) semantically presupposes (9)<sup>5</sup>.

If this is correct, then Frege held a view of semantic presuppositions generated by definite descriptions in subject-position. Besides, his view may be considered an instance of the general concept of semantic presupposition as defined in the previous chapter. In order to prove this, consider initially the undeniable fact that there are differences between the Fregean and the Strawsonian account. For example, Frege is asking a

*semantic question* of which the answer may be extended in order to explain the referential role of definite descriptions in subject-position, whereas Strawson clearly asks a *pragmatic question* about the uniquely referring use of definite descriptions in subject-position; Frege obtains a semantic relation between *thoughts*, whereas Strawson obtains a relation between *statements*.

These differences notwithstanding, I would argue that the previous discussion of Strawson's account and Frege's allows one to infer that both accounts are instances of the more general concept of semantic presupposition. For suppose we abstract from the above differences. In this case, although the motivating research question is different in each author and statements are different from thoughts, the relation obtained by Frege shares some properties with the relation obtained by Strawson. In fact, both relations: i) are semantic; ii) involve assessability for truth-value only in case of presuppositional success; iii) involve non-assessability for truth-value in case of presuppositional failure. If we go further, we may also claim that: i) both the Fregean thought (or, alternatively, the Strawsonian statement) and its negation have the same semantic presupposition; ii) if the presupposed Fregean thought (or, alternatively, Strawsonian statement) is true, then the presupposing thought (or, alternatively, Strawsonian statement) and its negation have opposite truth-values; iii) if the presupposed Fregean thought (or, alternatively, Strawsonian statement) is false, both the presupposing thought (or, alternatively, Strawsonian statement) and its negation are not assessable for truth-value; iv) the sense of the presupposing Fregean thought (or, alternatively, Strawsonian statement) does not include the sense of the presupposed thought (or, alternatively, Strawsonian statement).

In addition, the Fregean presupposed thought, which is expressed by a uniquely existential sentence, seems to share an important property with the Strawsonian uniquely existential presupposed statement: it has no presuppositions at all. Suppose 'P' and 'Q' are Fregean thoughts such that 'P' is expressed by a sentence containing a definite description in subject-position, 'Q' is expressed by a uniquely existential sentence containing the same description, and 'P' semantically presupposes 'Q'. Although Frege does not deal explicitly with this subject, his treatment of noun clauses in "On Sense and Reference" suggests that 'Q' has no presuppositions. For it may be inferred from his account that noun clauses in subject-position have a reference only if a thought stating the existence and uniqueness of the object referred to by the noun clause is true (1892a: 69). Given that 'Q' is essentially bivalent, that is, 'Q' has a truth-value even though the description it contains is empty, it follows that 'Q' does not semantically presuppose itself and needs not to presuppose semantically any other thought.

If the above interpretation is correct, then Frege seems to hold a view of semantic presupposition which is not only an instance of the general concept defined in the previous chapter, but also very close to Strawson's account. As already mentioned, even the status of the Fregean presupposing "thought" when the presupposed one is false is ambiguous, in an striking analogy with the ambiguous status of the Strawsonian presupposing "statement" yielded by the use of a sentence containing an empty description in subject-position. As a result, Frege's explanation of the referential role of definite descriptions in subject-position opposes Russell's Theory of Descriptions in a way which is similar to Strawson's. For example, in Frege's account, as in Strawson's: i) there is no need to postulate a propositional function in

order to eliminate the definite article in the way it is needed by the Theory of Descriptions; ii) the uniquely existential presupposed thought is not part of what is asserted by the presupposing thought; iii) when the presupposed thought is false, the presupposing one has no truth-value; iv) there is no such a thing as a primary or a secondary occurrence of the description; v) there are two layers of significance involved in the relation, that is, the layer corresponding to what is asserted and the one corresponding to what is semantically presupposed.

In addition to the above semantic concept, Frege also seems to have held a pragmatic concept of presupposition. But the latter may be shown to be different from the former. In order to prove this, return to Atlas' previously mentioned 1975 paper. Here he also distinguishes a Fregean *pragmatic presupposition* which is defined as a relationship between persons, contexts and thoughts<sup>6</sup>. As the source of the notion, he quotes the Fregean passage:

"Idealists or sceptics will perhaps long since have objected: 'You talk, without further ado, of the Moon as an object: but how do you know that the name 'the Moon' has any reference?' I reply that when we say 'the Moon', we do not intend to speak of our idea of the Moon, nor are we satisfied with the sense alone, but we presuppose a reference. To assume that in the sentence 'The Moon is smaller than the Earth' the idea of the Moon is in question, would be flatly to misunderstand the sense. If this is what the speaker wanted, he would use the phrase 'my idea of the Moon'. Now we can of course be mistaken in the presupposition, and such mistakes have indeed occurred. But the question whether the presupposition is perhaps always mistaken need not be answered here; in order to justify mention of the reference of a sign it is enough, at first, to point out our intention in speaking or thinking. (We must then add the reservation: provided such reference exists.)" (Frege 1892a: 61-2; Atlas 1975: 30)<sup>7</sup>.

Atlas interprets the above passage as belonging to a wider context in which Frege defends a distinction between: i)



the idea a person associates with an expression; ii) the sense of the expression: iii) the reference of the expression (1975: 30). Thus, to the idealists' and the sceptics' objection that we cannot talk about the objects in the world, Frege's reply is that the name 'the Moon' presupposes a reference. And Atlas thinks this particular employment of the term 'presupposition' suggests a pragmatic conception involving a relation between a speaker and a thought (id.). He formulates the conception in a way derived from Stalnaker: a speaker 'S' pragmatically presupposes a thought 'P' in a context 'C' if and only if S takes for granted that 'P' is true (1975: 29; see too Stalnaker 1970: 279-80).

But Atlas' suggestion is in need of some qualification. First, Atlas' reading shifts from the pragmatic presupposition of a Fregean name like "the Moon" to the pragmatic presupposition of a complete thought. As a matter of fact, thoughts are not mentioned in the above passage. Second, I would argue that the shift from names to definite descriptions is allowed. True, Frege's suggestion seems merely to be that someone who sincerely asserts something like 'the Moon is so-and-so' pragmatically presupposes that the name 'the Moon' has a reference. But at the bottom of the passage we may find a more general formulation. Here, Frege argues that in order to justify mention of the *reference of a sign* it is enough, at first, to point out our intention in speaking or thinking. This is a wording general enough to allow the conclusion that pointing out our intention in speaking or thinking justifies mentioning the reference of a definite description. Therefore, someone who sincerely asserts that 'the so-and-so is such-and-such' pragmatically presupposes that 'the so-and-so' has in fact a reference. Third, the pragmatic concept in the Fregean passage only involves persons and signs, whereas Atlas' reading, inspired by Stalnaker, involves persons, thoughts and contexts. Thus,

strictly speaking, it would seem that Atlas is not allowed to liken Stalnaker's concept to Frege's. If this is correct, then Atlas is right in his suggestion that Frege offers a concept of pragmatic presupposition, but wrong in his claim that such a concept is analogous to Stalnaker's.

Thus, Atlas' reading is at least correct in the claim that the Fregean account appeals not only to a concept of semantic presupposition, but also to a pragmatic one. And I would argue that the two concepts mentioned are different from each other. For the semantic concept is a relation between thoughts and their truth-values, in abstraction from speakers, whereas the pragmatic concept is a relation between speakers, their intentions and the signs used. As already mentioned, although the concepts are different, they are compatible and may be put together in the same account of language. Thus, Frege's account seems to entail that a speaker who sincerely asserts (5) ['The discoverer of the elliptic form of the planetary orbits died in misery'] involves the following relations: i) the thought expressed by (5) semantically presupposes the thought expressed by (9) ['There is exactly one discoverer of the elliptic form of the planetary orbits']; ii) the speaker pragmatically presupposes that the description 'the discoverer of the elliptic form of the planetary orbits' has a reference. Both presuppositions may be put together in the Fregean account of language without yielding contradiction.

Once the above distinction is made and the Fregean semantic concept of presupposition is clearly characterized, we may now turn our attention to an important consequence that the adoption of such a concept brings to Frege's semantics. The consequence concerns the different ways the referential role may be played by the Fregean proper names. This will be discussed in the next section.

IV - SEMANTIC PRESUPPOSITIONS GENERATED BY  
DEFINITE DESCRIPTIONS IN SUBJECT-POSITION  
AND FREGE'S ACCOUNT OF PROPER NAMES

According to my interpretation of Frege, definite descriptions are referring expressions which generate semantic presuppositions when in subject-position. But this view raises an important consequence in Frege's account.

In fact, the concept of semantic presupposition introduces an important distinction in the ways a Fregean proper name may refer. For Frege's concept of 'proper name' includes not only simple proper names, but also compound ones, a subset of which comprehends definite descriptions. And only definite descriptions seem to have semantic presuppositions in the sense previously defined. Fregean simple proper names have a different semantic relationship with their denotations. I shall explain this in what follows.

In Frege's view, a proper name is anything which is a sign for an object (1892b: 47). A proper name may be simple or compound (Frege 1892a: 69). Thus, several expressions, like definite descriptions or some subordinate clauses, may function as compound proper names, provided that they stand for an object. The usual proper names, like 'Kepler' or 'Sachse', are included in the category of 'simple proper names'. Obviously, Frege expands the concept of proper name in a way such that it comprehends the whole class of 'referring expressions'. This fact suggests that according to Frege proper names and definite descriptions basically function in the same way in our language, and that there is no significant difference between them. But this claim is to be tested by

means of the application of Frege's concept of semantic presupposition to simple proper names.

According to the concept, the employment of, say, the name 'Kepler' in a sentence like

(23) 'Kepler died in misery'

would semantically presuppose

(24) 'Kepler exists'.

Now we may ask about the nature of (24). According to Frege, (24) would make sense only with some special qualifications.

On the one hand (24) is equivalent to

(25) 'There is Kepler',

which is neither true nor false, but merely a senseless utterance (Frege 1892b: 50). One might suspect that the correct formulation of (24) should be

(26) 'There is a man whose name is Kepler',

but Frege argues that although (26) has a sense, the word 'Kepler' does not any longer function as a name here. It now belongs to the predicate 'a man whose name is Kepler'. (26) has a sense because 'there is' and its equivalents is a second level predicate, that is, it may be ascribed only to concepts (Frege 1891: 37-8). What is more, a word like 'Kepler' can never be a proper predicate, although it can form part of a genuine predicate (Frege 1892b: 44). The general result from this case is that it would be incorrect to say that the thought expressed by (23) semantically presupposes the thought expressed by (24) in

the same sense as a thought containing a definite description in subject-position semantically presupposes a uniquely existential thought.

On the other hand, (24) makes sense only if it is understood as signifying the metalinguistic principle that the name 'Kepler' has a reference. This is stated by Frege when he analyzes the same problem as regards the name 'Sachse' in his "Dialogue with Pünjer on Existence":

"If 'Sachse exists' is supposed to mean 'the word 'Sachse' is not an empty sound, but designates something', then it is true that the condition 'Sachse exists' must be satisfied. But this is not a new premise, but the presupposition of all our words - a presupposition which goes without saying" (Frege c. 1884: 60).

In the case of the name 'Kepler' and (24), one may infer from the above passage that (24) is a condition that must be satisfied if the name 'Kepler' is not an empty sound. (24) is not a new premise, but expresses the presupposition of all our words. Frege thinks that the presupposition goes without saying, and this might be interpreted in two ways: either it refers to the relationship between the name 'Kepler' and its denotation in abstraction from the speaker's beliefs or it expresses the speaker's beliefs. In the former case, the presupposition would be semantic; in the latter, it would be pragmatic. But given that Frege's account of language includes the appeal both to semantic and pragmatic presuppositions, it would be perfectly consistent to assume that the presupposition which goes without saying has both a semantic and a pragmatic reading. The semantic reading would abstract from the speaker's beliefs and only involve the principle that a simple proper name must designate something if it is not an empty sound. In this sense, the semantic principle is not to be confounded with the pragmatic principle that the name 'Kepler' has a



reference. For the pragmatic principle concerns the *speaker's belief* that there is exactly one object referred to by the name 'Kepler' when he sincerely uses the name in order to make an assertion; by contrast, the semantic principle concerns the relationship between the name 'Kepler' and its denotation, in abstraction from the speaker's beliefs and contexts. Thus, the semantic presupposition of a simple proper name is in fact a kind of Fregean *semantic principle* governing the use of our words. The principle can only be metalinguistically expressed and is so evident that it usually goes without saying. Once again, the general result from this case is that it would be incorrect to say that (23) semantically presupposes (24) in the same sense as a thought containing a definite description in subject-position semantically presupposes a uniquely existential thought concerning the object referred to by the description.

As a result, the use of simple proper names in subject-position does not seem to yield semantic presuppositions in the same way as definite descriptions do. And Frege's concept of 'proper name' involves an unexpected dualism in the referential function. In fact, his account entails that there are at least *two* kinds of proper name. First, there are proper names which function like definite descriptions in subject-position. These expressions generate semantic presuppositions which are expressed by thoughts asserting the existence and uniqueness of the object referred to by the description. Thus, a thought expressed by a sentence of the form

(27) 'The F is so-and-so'

semantically presupposes the thought expressed by a sentence of the form

(28) 'There is one and only one F'.

Second, there are proper names which function like the simple proper name 'Kepler' in subject-position. These expressions do not have semantic presuppositions in the same sense as definite descriptions. For a sentence of the form

(29) 'a is so-and-so'

in which 'a' is a simple proper name *does not* semantically presuppose

(30) 'a exists'.

As already mentioned, (30) is either senseless or expresses the metalinguistic principle that the name 'a' has a reference. The metalinguistic principle may be taken as a *semantic principle*, but it is not equivalent to the uniquely existential thought presupposed by the definite description in subject-position.

Now the above interpretation clashes with Kripke's claim that in Frege's account simple proper names are abbreviated or disguised descriptions (Kripke 1980: 27 ff.; see too Curry 1982: 169-71). True, Dummett has already argued against Kripke on this issue (Dummett 1981a: 110 ff.). But now Dummett's argument may be reinforced by the consideration of the semantic presuppositions generated by the expressions involved. For although a simple proper name may be substituted by a description having the same reference, a thought containing the simple proper name in subject-position is only committed to the semantic principle that the name has a reference, whereas a thought containing the description in subject-position semantically presupposes a uniquely existential thought. In other words, although 'the pupil of Plato' may sometimes successfully replace 'Aristotle', the sentence

(31) 'The pupil of Plato is a greek philosopher'

semantically presupposes

(32) 'There is one and only one pupil of Plato'

whereas

(33) 'Aristotle is a greek philosopher'

is only committed to the Fregean semantic principle which metalinguistically expresses the fact that the name 'Aristotle' designates something and does not semantically presuppose that there is exactly one Aristotle. Of course, one might object that (32) is equivalent to the semantic principle that the description 'the pupil of Plato' designates something. But the fact is that, in Frege's view, to the semantic principle concerning the description there corresponds the sentence (32) at the linguistic level, whereas to the semantic principle that the name 'Aristotle' has a denotation there corresponds *nothing* at the linguistic level.

In addition, the above difference between the semantic mechanisms entails that a mock simple proper name is different from a mock description. As a matter of fact, the mock proper name is possible in virtue of the pretence that the semantic principle that it has a reference is fulfilled. But the mock description is possible in virtue of the pretence that the thought affirming the existence and uniqueness of the object referred to by the description is true.

As a result, if simple proper names and definite descriptions in subject-position are submitted to different semantic relationships, they play different roles in language, and simple proper names cannot be

considered equivalent to concealed descriptions. In fact, although both definite descriptions and simple proper names belong to the same class of referring expressions, they must be different from each other in virtue of their different referential mechanisms. This may be considered a general result of Frege's account on simple proper names and definite descriptions. Thus, Kripke's claim is inspired by a mistaken interpretation of Frege's view.

As a result, the Fregean explanation of the referring function of definite descriptions by means of the concept of semantic presupposition yields a twofold account of the way a Fregean proper name refers: if the proper name is compound, then it refers in a way such that it generates semantic presuppositions in subject-position; if the proper name is simple, then it refers in a way such that it is submitted to the semantic principle that the name has a reference. Now the important conclusion to be drawn here is that both referring functions may coexist in the same system without yielding contradiction. True, Frege denounces the existence of the mechanism of semantic presuppositions generated by definite descriptions in subject-position as an imperfection of our language (1892a: 70). But by means of the procedure of only introducing a new sign as a proper name if it has been secured a reference, Frege is able to construct a logically perfect language in which definite descriptions that generate semantic presuppositions when in subject-position do coexist with simple proper names that are only submitted to the Fregean semantic principle. True, the relation of semantic presupposition is ignored by the perfect language. But it still exists and requires special stipulations in order to avoid the introduction of empty definite descriptions. The formal system in "Grundgesetze" illustrates this possibility. Now this affects the relationship between Russell's logically proper names and definite descriptions in subject-position, as well as

Strawson's criticism of the Theory of Descriptions. I shall discuss this in the next section.

V - RUSSELL AND STRAWSON ON  
SEMANTIC PRESUPPOSITIONS GENERATED BY  
DEFINITE DESCRIPTIONS IN SUBJECT-POSITION

The advantages of Russell's Theory of Descriptions are well known. If definite descriptions are incomplete symbols, their referential mechanism may be reducible to the way authentic proper names refer and the odd relationship of semantic presupposition may be dispensed with. But there is an important point to be made as regards the relationship between the Theory of Descriptions and the doctrine of logically proper names. This will involve discussing the following points: i) the referential mechanism of Russellian logically proper names; ii) the status of the Russellian paraphrase; iii) the different ways the gap between ordinary language and a perfect language containing logically proper names may be filled.

First, consider the referential mechanism of Russellian logically proper names. It seems that they also are submitted to the Fregean semantic principle. True, we cannot deny that there are significant differences between Russellian logically proper names and Fregean simple proper names. For example: i) the logically proper name does not have a sense, whereas the Fregean simple proper name has got one; ii) logically proper names denote Russellian 'simple objects', whereas Fregean simple proper names denote Fregean 'objects'; iii) logically proper names are combined to form Russellian 'atomic sentences', whereas Fregean simple proper names are combined to form Fregean 'sentences'. These differences notwithstanding, we



may say that the logically proper name shares the following important properties with the Fregean simple proper name in a perfect language: i) its meaning is its bearer (Russell 1918: 187; in Fregean terminology: its reference is its bearer); ii) it is a meaningless noise if there is no bearer (Russell 1918: 187-8; 1940: 245; in Fregean terminology: it is an empty name if there is no bearer); iii) it cannot be ascribed the predicate 'exists' (Russell 1925: 241, 250, 252; 1940: 165; in Fregean terminology: it cannot be ascribed the predicate 'exists'). Now the above properties reveal that the essential features of the Fregean semantic principle were applied in the explanation of the referential mechanism of Russellian logically proper names. Actually, the logically proper name is such that it must designate something if it is not an empty sound; this fact can only be expressed metalinguistically. Besides, a sentence containing a logically proper name in subject-position cannot be said to presuppose semantically the corresponding existential sentence, for the logically proper name cannot be ascribed the predicate 'exists'. Thus, Russellian logically proper names are in fact submitted to the Fregean semantic principle and this means they can, under the appropriate circumstances, be compatible with definite descriptions which generate semantic presuppositions when in subject-position.

Second, consider the status of the Russellian paraphrase. Suppose someone says

(34) 'The book of verses is red'.

According to Russell, (34) is equivalent to

(35) 'There is an  $x$  such that  $x$  is a book of verses and for all  $y$ , if  $y$  is a book of verses, then  $y$  is  $x$ , and  $x$  is red'.

(35), in turn, may be completely formalized as

(36)  $'(Ex)(Bx \ \& \ (y)(By \ \rightarrow \ y=x) \ \& \ Rx)'$ ,

where 'B' and 'R' respectively stand for the predicates 'is a book of verses' and 'is red'. 'The book of verses' is the subject-expression in (34), and this fact suggests that the description refers to an object in the world. But Russell's analysis reveals that this is not the case, for the description is no longer the subject-expression in (35) and (36). 'The book of verses' is replaced by a set of propositional functions which do not refer to an object in the world, but which have an argument-place for an object in the world. In fact, the propositional functions may be true or false, provided there is an object in the world that satisfies them.

But this is not the end of the matter. For the argument for the variables in propositions (35) and (36) is a determinate book of verses, and things like books are mere *logical fictions* in Russell's account. As a matter of fact, the complete analysis of (34) goes further and yields a complex proposition containing either logically proper names or variables for logically proper names. Since we do not know the detailed logical form of the complex proposition, we may at least suppose that its generic form might be

(37)  $'(Ex_1) \dots (Ex_n)[(B\{x_1 \dots x_n\} \ \& \ R\{x_1 \dots x_n\})]'$ .

Here,  $'(Ex_1) \dots (Ex_n)[ \quad ]'$  stands for an existential function of which the variables  $'x_1 \dots x_n'$  represent the cluster of atomic constituents that satisfy both the functions  $'B\{x_1 \dots x_n\}'$  and  $'R\{x_1 \dots x_n\}'$ ;  $'B\{x_1 \dots x_n\}'$  stands for a kind of function of which the predicate 'B' represents the cluster of predicates that are satisfied by the cluster of atomic constituents  $'x_1 \dots x_n'$  in a way such

that they uniquely characterize the object referred to by the description 'The book of verses'; ' $R\{x_1 \dots x_n\}$ ' stands for a same kind of function of which the predicate 'R' represents the cluster of predicates that are satisfied by the cluster of atomic constituents ' $x_1 \dots x_n$ ' in a way such that they exhaustively characterize the ordinary language predicate 'is red'. Thus, the variables ' $x_1$ '... ' $x_n$ ' stand for the Russellian atomic constituents which are known by acquaintance and designated by logically proper names; 'B' and 'R' are abbreviations respectively for the clusters of predicates that specify the articulations of atomic constituents characterizing a unique book of verses ('B') that is red ('R'). The atomic variables and the clusters are such that they exhaustively give the truth conditions of (37). Since (37) is equivalent to (34), (35) and (36), (37) equally gives the truth conditions of all these propositions.

Now consider the sentences (34) and (37): (34) belongs to ordinary language and contains an unauthentic subject-expression ('the book of verses') standing for an unauthentic object (the book to which the definite description refers is only a logical fiction); (37) belongs to a logically perfect language and contains in the argument-places a cluster of variables standing for authentic objects, that is, atomic constituents which are designated by logically proper names. As to proposition (36), it has a peculiar status. On the one hand, (36) is the analyzed form of (34) and thus reveals that 'the book of verses', although in the subject-position, is an unauthentic referring expression. On the other hand, (36) may be further analyzed into (37), and this reveals that (36) contains in the argument-places a cluster of variables which still stand for an unauthentic object, that is, a logical fiction (a determinate book of verses that has a red cover).

As a result, (36) seems to belong to an intermediate level of language. But this entails two important consequences concerning the relationships between (34), (36) and (37). The first consequence is that although (36) reveals the misleading form of (34), (37) reveals that (36) itself is still misleading. For the variable 'x' in (36) stands for an unauthentic object to which we cannot genuinely refer. The second consequence is that the full analysis of (34) and (36) would be the detailed form of (37), although the latter is only postulated (in fact, Russell never offered an example of a complete analysis, in terms of logically proper names, of a sentence like (34)). Thus, the gap between sentences like (34) and (37) is so big that it might be filled in a different way.

Third, consider the following alternative way of filling the gap between ordinary language and a perfect language containing logically proper names. By contrast with Russell, suppose that definite descriptions in the subject-position of declarative sentences are taken as authentic referring expressions.

In this case, the description 'The book of verses' would occupy the argument place of the predicate 'is red' in (34) and the sentence would be analyzed as follows:

(38) 'Is red (The book of verses)'.

But the description would refer only if the following sentence is true:

(39) 'There is exactly one book of verses'.

Thus, we may say that the statement made with (34) (or its equivalent made with (38)) semantically presupposes the

statement made with (39) in the sense of the general concept. For if (38) is true, then (39) is also true; if the negation of (38) is true, then (39) is also true; if (39) is true, both (38) and its negation have a truth-value; if (39) is false, both (38) and its negation are truth-valueless.

Now the problem is how to explain all these sentences in terms of logically proper names and simultaneously preserve the relation of semantic presupposition. This may be made as follows.

If we assume that (34) contains an authentic referring expression and take its analysis further, we may suppose that we shall obtain the following fully-analyzed generic form for the intermediate sentence (38):

$$(40) 'R\{x_1 \dots x_n\}[\backslash x_1 \dots x_n B\{x_1 \dots x_n\}]'$$

Here, ' $R\{x_1 \dots x_n\}[\ ]$ ' and ' $\backslash x_1 \dots x_n B\{x_1 \dots x_n\}$ ' respectively stand for a special function and a special argument that may be defined as follows: i) ' $R\{x_1 \dots x_n\}$ ' and ' $B\{x_1 \dots x_n\}$ ' are functions similar to the ones presented in (37); ii) ' $R\{x_1 \dots x_n\}[\ ]$ ' stands for another kind of function of which the arguments may be any cluster of 'n' atomic constituents, and that is satisfied by the unique cluster of 'n' atomic constituents satisfying a certain description, say the description 'The book of verses'; iii) ' $\backslash x_1 \dots x_n B\{x_1 \dots x_n\}$ ' stands for an argument of the function ' $R\{x_1 \dots x_n\}[\ ]$ ' in a way such that if the cluster of atomic constituents represented by the variables ' $x_1 \dots x_n$ ' uniquely satisfy the cluster of predicates ' $B\{x_1 \dots x_n\}$ ', then they may occupy the argument-places in ' $R\{x_1 \dots x_n\}$ ' and otherwise not. In the current case, ' $B\{x_1 \dots x_n\}$ ' stands for the cluster of predicates that are satisfied by the cluster of arguments ' $x_1 \dots x_n$ ' in a way such that the predicates and arguments



uniquely characterize the complex designated by the description 'The book of verses'; ' $R\{x_1 \dots x_n\}$ ' stands for the cluster of arguments and predicates such that they exhaustively characterize the predicate 'is red'. (40) would not be further analyzable, thus confirming ' $\lambda x_1 \dots x_n B\{x_1 \dots x_n\}$ ' as an authentic referring expression occupying the argument-place of the above function ' $R\{x_1 \dots x_n\}$ '. The ' $\lambda x_1 \dots x_n$ ' operator in (40) is an adaptation of Frege's function ' $\lambda x$ ' as defined in "Grundgesetze"<sup>8</sup>.

As for (39), its final analysis would yield the generic form

$$(41) \quad '(Ex_1) \dots (Ex_n) [B\{x_1 \dots x_n\}]',$$

where, as in Russell's case, the cluster of variables ' $x_1 \dots x_n$ ' represent the atomic constituents which are designated by logically proper names; ' $B\{x_1 \dots x_n\}$ ' is an abbreviation for the cluster of predicates that are satisfied by the cluster of arguments ' $x_1 \dots x_n$ ' in a way such that the predicates and arguments uniquely characterize the complex designated by 'The book of verses'.

The truth-conditions of the newly defined function (40) may be characterized as follows. Two alternatives are possible. First, the arguments of (40) may be logically proper names. In this case, (40) will be true or false depending on the adequacy of the cluster of predicates defined by ' $R\{x_1 \dots x_n\}$ ' to the cluster of logically proper names that occupy the argument-places of such predicates. Second, the argument of (40) may be a definite description of which the complete analysis would yield an expression of the form ' $\lambda x_1 \dots x_n B\{x_1 \dots x_n\}$ '. In this case, the fact that the argument of (40) has a reference will depend on the truth of (41). Thus, if (41) is true, the description in (40) has a referent and (40)

will be either true or false; if (41) is false, the description in (40) has no referent and (40) will be truth-valueless. As a result, we may say that, in the current case: i) if (40) is true, then (41) is also true; ii) if the negation of (40) is true, then (41) is also true; iii) if (41) is true, then both (40) and its negation have a truth-value; iv) otherwise, both (40) and its negation are truth-valueless. The analysis is such that the fully-analyzed form of (38) semantically presupposes the fully-analyzed form of (39). In this way, the relation of semantic presupposition holding between (38) and (39) is preserved. This would yield the striking result that, although (40) and (41) are fully-analyzed sentences containing variables representing logically proper names, (40) will semantically presuppose (41) in the sense of the general concept. Of course, the function expressed by (40) might be accused of artificialism. But the point I am trying to make depends on consistency, and not on artificialism.

If this is correct, it would be possible to construct a formal system in which all propositions are ultimately analyzable into atomic propositions containing either atomic constituents, or variables for atomic constituents, and definite descriptions are authentic referring expressions which generate semantic presuppositions in the sense of the general concept. But in order to avoid referential failure and the awkward truth-valueless propositions, the system might adopt the Fregean procedure of providing a conventional denotation, say, the null class, for the functions of the form of the argument in (40) when their corresponding existential functions are false. The system suggested might be such that: i) if (41) is true, then the argument ' $x_1 \dots x_n B\{x_1 \dots x_n\}$ ' in (40) will have as its denotation the cluster of logically proper names that satisfy the cluster function ' $B\{x_1 \dots x_n\}$ '; ii) if (41) is false, then the

argument ' $\{x_1 \dots x_n\} B\{x_1 \dots x_n\}$ ' in (40) will have the null class as its denotation. In this way, if Russell's paraphrase represented by (37) is true, its corresponding sentences (40) and (41) in the system suggested will be also true. But then the sentence ' $(\exists x_1) \dots (\exists x_n) [\{x_1 \dots x_n\} \& R\{x_1 \dots x_n\}]$ ' will be also true in such a system. If the internal negation of the Russellian paraphrase is true, the conjunction of (41) and the negation of (40) will be also true. But then the sentence ' $(\exists x_1) \dots (\exists x_n) [\{x_1 \dots x_n\} \& \neg R\{x_1 \dots x_n\}]$ ' will be also true in the new system. If the external negation of the Russellian paraphrase is true, the negation of the conjunction of (40) and (41) will be also true. But then the sentence ' $\neg (\exists x_1) \dots (\exists x_n) [\{x_1 \dots x_n\} \& R\{x_1 \dots x_n\}]$ ' will be also true in the system suggested. Thus, it is the conjunction of the truth-conditions of the propositions of the form of (40) and (41) that will yield the complete list of truth-conditions for (34) and (39) in the system suggested. Russell blames the Fregean procedure for being artificial, but he simultaneously acknowledges that it may not lead to actual logical error (Russell 1905: 484). I see no reason to disagree with him, even though the procedure is extended to a system involving logically proper names.

If this is correct, then Strawson's criticism of the Theory of Descriptions is not itself without problems. For he suggests that the basis of Russell's Theory is somehow the doctrine of logically proper names. He argues that the Theory seems to imply that: i) a sentence containing a definite description in subject-position is grammatically of the subject-predicate form; ii) if the grammatical subject does not refer to anything, then either the sentence in question is not logically of the subject-predicate form or it is meaningless (Strawson 1950: 322). But he also thinks that this in its turn seems to imply that: iii) if there are sentences which are genuinely of the subject-predicate form, then the fact

that they have a meaning guarantees that the logical (and grammatical) subject has a referent; iv) there are sentences which are logically of the subject-predicate form (1950: 323). In order to show that Russell's Theory seems not only to imply (i)-(iv), but that he accepted at least (i)-(ii), Strawson invokes the two principles of the doctrine of logically proper names: (1) they are the only candidates to occupy the subject-position in sentences which are logically of the subject-predicate form; (2) the meaning of a logically proper name is its bearer. According to Strawson, anyone who believes in (1)-(2) would deny that a sentence containing a description in subject-position is logically of the subject-predicate form (1950: 323). But Strawson omits two important facts here.

The first is that, historically, the doctrine of logically proper names was formulated several years *after* the Theory of Descriptions. It is very difficult to imagine that the former might constitute the theoretical basis for the latter. For this would entail that the 1918 doctrine of logically proper names was implicitly contained in the 1905 Theory of Descriptions. In my opinion, this is against all historical evidence and could hardly be the case. In order to justify his claim, Strawson would have to prove that Russell in fact accepted (iii)-(iv) and (1)-(2) by the time he wrote "On Denoting". But this is not what Strawson really does. Actually, he only suggests this possibility by means of the weakened expression 'seems to imply'. What is more, he is only entitled to affirm that Russell accepted (i)-(ii).

In addition, the suggestion is contradicted by the second fact omitted by Strawson: from the above analysis of the relationship between logically proper names and definite descriptions which generate semantic presuppositions, we may infer that it is the Theory of

Descriptions by itself that entails that definite descriptions in subject-position are not referring expressions; Russell's doctrine of logically proper names only entails that descriptions are *not* logically proper names, not that they cannot be referring expressions with the help of logically proper names. Actually, logically proper names are submitted to the Fregean semantic principle and may be coupled with definite descriptions in a way such that the latter may be taken as authentic referring expressions which generate semantic presuppositions when in subject-position. True, this would not be in the spirit of Russell's philosophy. But the conjunction of logically proper names and definite descriptions as authentic referring expressions is a consistent hypothesis. As a matter of fact, Frege's account of simple proper names and definite descriptions as referring expressions which involve different referential mechanisms is an instance of this hypothesis. Another instance would be a formal system containing both the analysis of (39) and (40) in terms of atomic constituents and the relation of semantic presupposition for these propositions. Thus, Strawson's criticism, although it deals with some genuine difficulties of Russell's theory of logically proper names, misses its real target, namely the Theory of Descriptions.

If the above argument concerning the relationship between logically proper names, descriptions as incomplete symbols and descriptions which generate semantic presuppositions is correct, then an important consequence follows. But this will be discussed in the next section.



VI - AN IMPORTANT CONSEQUENCE CONCERNING SEMANTIC  
PRESUPPOSITIONS, DEFINITE DESCRIPTIONS AND  
LOGICALLY PROPER NAMES

The previous discussion allows the drawing of the following important conclusion as regards the referential function of definite descriptions in subject-position: as far as the accounts discussed are concerned, the controversy seems to be undecidable at the purely semantic level. Two main reasons may be given for this: i) the ambiguous referential status of definite descriptions in subject-position in ordinary English; ii) the relative independence between the accounts involved. I shall comment them in what follows.

First, consider the status of definite descriptions in subject-position in ordinary English. Although this has not been mentioned before, we may conclude from the discussion so far that descriptions share some of the features of both predicate expressions and referring expressions. For on the one hand the predicate 'exists' may be ascribed to a certain description, say 'the so-and-so', in

(42) 'The so-and-so exists',

whereas the same predicate cannot be ascribed to a proper name like 'John' without further ado. This is a feature belonging to predicates and suggests that descriptions in subject-position are in fact concealed predicates. Some authors even claim that 'exists' is a second order predicate, that is, a predicate ascribable only to other predicates (propositional functions). On the other hand, other predicates like 'is bald' may be ascribed both to definite descriptions in subject-position and proper names. This is a feature belonging to referring

expressions and suggests that descriptions in subject-position do actually refer to the objects they describe and are not concealed predicates. This fact gives definite descriptions an ambiguous referential status and allows the construction of radically different models for explaining their referential role in language.

Another way of making the same point may be found in C. Wright. As he puts it,

"Consider any equivalence of the type: ' $G_k D(a)$  iff  $F_k a$ '. What the intuition requires is that if the two halves of this biconditional really are equivalent, as they were set up to be, then any reference to an object effected by one is also effected by the other, and vice versa. But the question is: which form of expression has priority? No doubt that the right-hand side has epistemological priority, for it was by reference to it that the meaning of the left-hand side was explained. But which side has ontological priority? (...)

"That is: if we are prepared to say that an apparent singular term (by Fregean criteria) need not really be so, so that the grammatical form of the sentences in which it occurs is potentially misleading, then why should it not be possible for the grammatical form of a sentence to be potentially misleading the other way round, so to speak? Why should it not be possible for a sentence containing no isolatable part which refers to a particular object nevertheless to achieve, as a whole, a reference to that object -- as is attested by the fact that it is equivalent to a sentence in which such a reference is explicit?" (1983: 31-2).

Wright's expression ' $G_k D(a)$  iff  $F_k a$ ' is a general formula that contains Russell's equivalence

(43) ' $R\{(ix)Bx\} \langle == \rangle (Ex)(Bx \ \& \ (y)(By \ \rightarrow \ y=x) \ \& \ Rx)$ '

as one of its instances. Wright argues that if the equivalence holds, there are no criteria for deciding which of its sides is a more perspicuous description of reality<sup>9</sup>. This is an important point, for it reveals the

ambiguous referential status of definite descriptions from a different perspective.

I would add that both the above arguments illustrate the fact that English speaking people seem to have no direct linguistic intuitions for deciding the Russell/Strawson controversy (cf. Kripke 1979: 20).

Second, consider the relationships between the account of descriptions as referring expressions which generate semantic presuppositions (Frege, Strawson), the account of descriptions as incomplete symbols (Russell) and an account of simple proper names as referring expressions which have their own referential mechanisms. Although stemming from different basic motivations, both the Theory of Presuppositions and the Theory of Descriptions allow the following -- and striking -- phenomenon: one may adopt any of them without necessarily committing oneself to the specific theory of proper names which is historically connected to the adopted Theory. For example, one may adopt the Theory of Descriptions and commit oneself to a theory of logically proper names, as Russell does; but one may also adopt the Theory of Descriptions without committing oneself to logically proper names, as Quine does. Alternatively, one may adopt the Theory of Presuppositions and a theory of simple proper names as referring expressions which do not involve semantic presuppositions like definite descriptions, as Frege does; but one may also adopt the Theory and commit oneself to a theory of proper names as semantically presupposing clusters of descriptions, as Strawson does in "Individuals" (1959: 191-2); one may also adopt both the Theory of Presuppositions and the doctrine of logically proper names, as it has been shown in the previous section. Thus, both accounts of definite descriptions seem to be compatible with divergent theories of proper names. As a result, these Theories, although stemming from

different motivations, deal with a subject which is sufficiently restricted so as to allow them, within certain limits, to be compatible with divergent theories of proper names. I shall call this the 'relative independence' of both accounts as regards the corresponding theory of proper names.

Therefore, Russell's Theory of Descriptions and his doctrine of logically proper names are relatively independent of each other, and this relative independence allows the construction of a formal system in which both logically proper names and definite descriptions are referring expressions. In fact, Russell's doctrine of logically proper names does not impede descriptions of being referring expressions and semantically presupposing in the sense of the general concept as defined in the previous chapter. In "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism", Russell distinguishes descriptions and ordinary proper names from logically proper names by means of his analysis of the question of existence. He thinks the question can only arise with respect to definite descriptions. For the meaning of a logically proper name is the object it denotes: if a description were an authentic name, the question of existence of the object denoted by the description could not arise. Since the question can arise, descriptions are not names. As to ordinary proper names, once they also admit the question of existence, they too are concealed descriptions. Nevertheless, this amounts to affirming that descriptions and ordinary proper names are not logically proper names. Actually, nothing obstructs the choice of Frege's proposal that the question of existence arises in the analysis of descriptions precisely because thoughts containing them in subject-position semantically presuppose a uniquely existential thought. True, Frege would not interpret the latter as ultimately reducible to atomic thoughts containing logically proper names. But the existential thought would constitute the

end of the analysis in the case of thoughts containing descriptions in subject-position. Thus, Russell's doctrine of logically proper names does not in fact entail the rejection of the general concept of semantic presupposition for descriptions.

The only thing one may say is that postulating logically proper names suggests that sentences containing descriptions in subject-position might be better interpreted as ultimately reducible to uniquely existential sentences containing proper names. But this does not mean that the only way to reduce descriptions to logically proper names is Russell's paraphrase. In fact, it has been shown above that the doctrine of logically proper names is also compatible with the Fregean or the Strawsonian view of descriptions as referring expressions.

Similarly, definite descriptions in subject-position which generate semantic presuppositions in the sense of the general concept do not impede simple proper names of being referring expressions and being submitted to some form of the Fregean semantic principle. This may be inferred not only from the fact that Frege's account admits this, but also from the fact that the referential mechanisms involved by Fregean simple proper or Russellian logically proper names and descriptions do not clash. Actually, proper names and descriptions may be taken as referring expressions which belong to different categories and thus have different referential links. As a result, it is the Russellian account of definite descriptions as incomplete symbols, and not the Russellian theory of logically proper names, that entails the rejection of the general concept of semantic presupposition generated by descriptions in subject-position.



If the above argument is correct, then one might adapt the calculus of "Principia Mathematica" so that it could contain definite descriptions as Fregean referring expressions. Of course, this would be totally against the Russellian spirit. But it would not be incorrect. In fact, it would only require the view that descriptions in ordinary language are referring expressions which semantically presuppose in the sense suggested by Frege, and that this is an imperfection to be avoided in the formal system by means of special stipulations. Amazingly, the adaptation of the calculus of "Principia" would involve nothing but: i) the alteration of Russell's remarks, in the 'Introduction' (1925: 30) and in Chapter III (1925: 66 ff.), that descriptions are incomplete symbols; ii) the special stipulation that a definite description, say  $(\lambda x)Fx$ , can be introduced as a referring expression only if the proposition stating the existence and the uniqueness of the object referred to by the description, that is,  $(\exists x)(Fx \ \& \ (y)(Fy \Rightarrow y=x))$ , is true. Call the new system "F-Principia". In it, even though descriptions are considered referring expressions, all Russellian equivalences involving ' $(\lambda x)Fx$ ' when ' $(\exists x)(Fx \ \& \ (y)(Fy \Rightarrow y=x))$ ' is true will hold. The system will thus be equivalent to a subsystem of "Principia"<sup>10</sup>. As a result, even Frege's stipulation that an empty description is to denote the null class would not be necessary: the Russellian definitions expressed by

$$(44) \ 'E!(\lambda x)(Fx) = (\exists c)((x)(Fx \leftrightarrow x=c)) \ Df'$$

(1925: 30; 174)

and

$$(45) \ 'f((\lambda x)(Fx)) = (\exists c)(x)((Fx \leftrightarrow x=c) \ \& \ fc) \ Df'$$

(1925: 25)

would do the job properly.

If so, one may object that the system "F-Principia" vindicates the correctness of Russell's paraphrase, and his claim that descriptions are incomplete symbols. But things are not that simple. As already mentioned, C. Wright has shown that none of the sides of the equivalence expressed by (45) has ontological priority. If this is correct, "F-Principia" adopts Russell's paraphrase, but does not vindicate his claim that definite descriptions are incomplete symbols. In fact, "F-Principia" would be different from "Principia" in that it includes definite descriptions as genuine referring expressions. But it would still be logically equivalent to "Principia". As to the Fregean relation of semantic presupposition itself, it would not play any role within the system. For it is only conceived as the "odd" logical relation that guarantees the reference to definite descriptions in ordinary language. In a formal system, the "odd" features of the logical relation must be excluded to the benefit of a logically perfect language<sup>11</sup>.

Therefore, the whole discussion seems to suggest that, as far as the accounts discussed are concerned, the question about the referring mechanism of definite descriptions in subject-position is undecidable at the purely semantic level. The inconclusiveness of the dispute at the purely semantic level seems also to suggest that further considerations, perhaps pragmatic ones, are to be introduced in order to decide the issue.

## VII - FINAL REMARKS

So far, the problem of semantic presuppositions generated by definite descriptions in subject-position is formulated; the pragmatic and semantic considerations involved are made explicit; the relevant features of the

Fregean-Strawsonian and Russellian views on the problem are outlined; the inconclusive character of the controversy at the purely semantic level is suggested. We may now turn our attention to Wittgenstein. He has made such an important contribution to the philosophical thinking in our century that it is quite natural to ask whether or not he has anything to say on this issue. Thus, from now on my chief question will be this: what is Wittgenstein's contribution to a possible solution of the problem of semantic presuppositions generated by definite descriptions in subject-position? More specifically, what is Wittgenstein's contribution to the problem in each main period of the development of his philosophical thinking? Given that we traditionally discern two different and apparently opposed philosophies in the development of Wittgenstein's thought, I shall consider one at a time. For each Wittgensteinian philosophy, I shall locate his possible view of presupposition and then try to discuss how any such conception relates to the problem of semantic presuppositions generated by definite descriptions. The expectation is a reasonable one, that the execution of this whole task will reveal two radically different solutions to the problem in question and that the solutions will have the seal of Wittgenstein's originality.

#### NOTES

1. At this point, it is worth making a comparison of the German text and the translation involved. The German passage runs:

"Nun haben die Sprachen den Mangel, dass in ihnen Ausdrücke mögliche sind, welche nach ihrer grammatischen Form bestimmt erscheinen, einen Gegenstand zu bezeichnen, diese ihre Bestimmung aber in besonderen Fällen nicht erreichen, weil das von der Wahrheit eines Satzes abhängt" (Frege 1969: 55).

Geach and Black's translation runs:

"Now languages have the fault of containing expressions which fail to designate an object (although their grammatical form seems to qualify them for that purpose) because the truth of some sentence is a *prerequisite*" (Frege 1892a: 69; italics mine).

Now a more literal translation would run:

"Now the languages have the fault that within them [languages] some expressions are possible which, according to their [the expressions'] grammatical form, determinately seem to designate an object, but they [expressions] do not reach their determinateness in certain cases, for this depends on the truth of some sentence".

Of course, Geach and Black's translation is stylistically better than my literal translation. But their improving the style of this particular passage involves a qualification. Although Geach and Black seem to preserve the sense of Frege's thought in their translation, they introduce the term 'prerequisite' which is *not* in the German text. Now this suggests that Frege held the view that there is a semantic relation involved and that the relation may be expressed by means of a concept which might be called a 'semantic prerequisite'. This is not misleading only because *there is in fact* such a relation in Frege's text. For this reason, I see no problem in adopting the term for defining the semantic relation involved.

2. I shall skip the analysis of conditional clauses. It would be too complex and unnecessary, since the previous analysis of noun clauses and adjective clauses already reveals that definite descriptions in subject-position do in fact generate semantic prerequisites in Frege's view.

3. Atlas makes some cuts in the Fregean passage. Since the cuts might endanger the correct understanding of Frege's thought, I have reproduced the passage in full.

4. Atlas correctly notes that in the analysis of the simple proper name 'Kepler' Frege puts forward his view that the presupposition of a sentence and of its negation is the same (Frege 1892a: 69; Atlas 1975: 71).

5. But this fact reveals at the same time an important difference as regards the nature of the presupposed thought in Frege's view. For in the case of adverbial clauses, the presupposed thought is a factual one, like, for example, (19) ['Schleswig-Holstein was once separated from Denmark'], whereas in the case of other



subordinate clauses it is an existential one, like, for example, (6) ['There was someone who discovered the elliptic form of the planetary orbits']. This difference suggests that the relation of semantic presupposition might involve unexpected individuating features. But Frege does not explicitly discuss this fact and I am only concerned with the case of presupposed existential thoughts.

6. As already mentioned, Atlas distinguishes three different Fregean concepts of presupposition in his paper. Besides the 'semantic' and the 'pragmatic' concepts of presupposition, Atlas spots an 'assertoric presupposition' which is defined as a relation between an illocutionary act of a speaker and propositions (1979: 29; 31-4). But the analysis of the latter goes beyond the purpose of my work.

7. Once again, instead of following Atlas' quotation which involves a cut, I reproduce the Fregean text in full.

8. In "The Basic Laws of Arithmetic", Frege introduces the function ' $\lambda x$ ' which is defined as follows: i) if to the argument there corresponds an object  $a$  such that the argument is ' $y(a = y)$ ', then let the value of the function ' $\lambda x$ ' be  $a$  itself; ii) if to the argument there does not correspond an object  $a$  such that the argument is ' $y(a = )$ ', then let the value of the function be the argument itself. As a result, ' $\lambda x(a = x) = a$ ' refers to the True, and ' $\lambda xFx$ ' denotes the object falling under the concept ' $F(x)$ ' if ' $F(x)$ ' is a concept under which falls one and only one object; ' $\lambda xF(x)$ ' denotes the same as ' $\lambda xF(x)$ ' in all other cases. The function ' $\lambda x$ ' is the Fregean substitute for the definite article in ordinary language. In virtue of Frege's definition, the danger of introducing definite descriptions which are devoid of denotation is excluded. For the function ' $\lambda xF(x)$ ' will always have a denotation in all possible cases, namely whether the function ' $\lambda xF(x)$ ' be either a concept under which fall exactly one object, or under which falls no object or more than one, or not a concept at all (see Frege 1893: 48-51).

9. Wright claims that this idea was formerly introduced by Alston (1958).

10. This is related to Russell's distinction between primary and secondary occurrences of the description and the ambiguity of negation. Both the distinction and the ambiguity would not hold in 'F-Principia'. This may be inferred from Russell's discussion of the two different interpretations of ' $(\lambda x)Fx$ '. As he puts it:

"When ' $(\lambda x)Fx$ ' exists, the two interpretations



[primary and secondary occurrence of the description] of the ambiguity give equivalent results; but when '(ix)Fx' does not exist, one interpretation is true and one is false" (Russell 1925: 69).

Since the special stipulation in (ii) is such that '(ix)Fx' always exists, there would be neither the two interpretations nor the ambiguity of negation in the system 'F-Principia'.

11. But then it would be also possible to adapt, say, the Fregean system of "The Basic Laws of Arithmetic" in a way such that it may include definite descriptions as Russellian incomplete symbols.

The Fregean function '\x' may be replaced by an alternative one, in Russellian terms. In a footnote to his translation of Frege's "On Concept and Object", Geach makes the following suggestion:

"When Russell says that expressions like 'The King of France' are not names but incomplete symbols, he is saying what would be put thus in Frege's terminology: 'In 'the King of France is bald', 'the King of France' is not a name of an object; what it stands for is something incomplete, *ungesattigt* -- a *second level* concept, within which the concept *bald* is falsely asserted to fall. This second-level concept is one *within* which a concept falls if and only if there falls *under* it someone who is a King of France and apart from whom nobody is a King of France; no first-level concept does fall within this, because nobody is a King of France'.

"It should, however, be emphasized that Frege himself gives an entirely different account of definite descriptions." (Geach & Black 1966: 51).

Geach's final remark is very significant. He prudently informs the reader that Frege's account of definite descriptions is different from the one just mentioned, but at the same time he implies that a Russellian account would be entirely possible within the Fregean framework. Geach seems to be right. As a matter of fact, his definition of definite descriptions in Fregean terminology has the following features: i) a view on definite descriptions that do not function as referring expressions like proper names is perfectly possible within the Fregean system; ii) according to this Russellian view within the Fregean system, a definite description does not function like a proper name; instead, it is a second-level concept within which a first-level concept falls iff there falls under the first-level concept a unique object. This is possible because Frege's distinction of concept and object is complemented by his distinction of a relation of an object to a first-level concept and a relation of a first-

level concept to a second-level one: the object falls *under* the first-level concept, whereas the first-level concept falls *within* the second-level one (Frege 1891: 50-1). If Geach is right, then the adaptation is possible and we might construct an alternative formal system, call it "R-Grundgesetze", such that definite descriptions are not referring expressions and may be replaced by the Russellian paraphrase. For reasons of space, I shall not consider the question whether or not the system "R-Grundgesetze" is equivalent to the one expounded in Frege's "Grundgesetze".

PART TWO

CHAPTER 3  
THE "TRACTATUS" AND SEMANTIC PRESUPPOSITIONS  
GENERATED BY DEFINITE DESCRIPTIONS  
IN SUBJECT-POSITION

I - PRELIMINARY REMARKS

In this chapter, I shall present and analyze the Tractarian solution to the problem of semantic presupposition of definite descriptions in subject-position. In the first section, I shall argue not only that the early Wittgenstein's solution to the problem is the Russellian Theory of Descriptions, but also that he imposes some modifications on the Theory. This raises the question whether or not the modifications give rise to a different theory. In the second section, I shall analyze the modifications imposed by Wittgenstein on the Russellian account of descriptions, in order to answer to this question. Now the problem of the relationships between the general concept of semantic presupposition and the Tractarian system is still open. Thus, in the third section, I shall analyze the relationships between the general concept and a sub-system of the "Tractatus", containing the Picture Theory and the doctrine of simple signs. In the fourth section, I shall analyze the relationship between the general concept of semantic presupposition and another sub-system of the "Tractatus", now containing only the requirement of primitive simple signs. In the fifth and final section, I shall summarize the Tractarian solution to the problem of semantic presupposition generated by definite descriptions in subject-position.

## II - THE TRACTARIAN THEORY OF DESCRIPTIONS

The early Wittgenstein's solution to the problem of presupposition of definite descriptions in subject-position is the Theory of Descriptions. It is well known that Wittgenstein admired Russell's approach by the time the Tractarian philosophy was fermenting in his mind. Wittgenstein's admiration was so great that he adopted the Theory in the Tractarian system. But he also seems to have modified the Russellian account. This may be confirmed by the considerations below.

First, there is an important remark in a letter Wittgenstein wrote to Russell in 1913:

"... The only other thing I want to say is that your Theory of Descriptions is *quite undoubtedly* right, even if the individual primitive signs in it are quite different from what you believe" (Von Wright 1974: 128; Wittgenstein's italics).

The above passage clearly shows that in 1913 Wittgenstein adopted the Russellian Theory of Descriptions, although he thought the Theory was in need of some qualification.

Second, it may be shown that the principle of analysis of the Theory of Descriptions persisted in Wittgenstein's mind by the time he wrote the "Tractatus". This may be confirmed by aphorism 4.0031:

"(...) It was Russell who performed the service of showing that the apparent logical form of a proposition need not be its real one" (1922b).

Third and finally, the adoption of the Theory by the Tractarian philosophy may be also shown. Early in the "Tractatus", Wittgenstein claims:



"Every statement about complexes can be resolved into a statement about their constituents and into the propositions that describe the complex completely" (1922b: 2.0201).

Of course, the class of statements about complexes includes the sub-class of statements containing in subject-position a certain expression standing for the complex. What is more, the expression standing for the complex is a description, for a complex can be given only by its description (1922b: 3.24). Thus, the class of Wittgenstein's 'statements about complexes' seems to include the sub-class of statements containing a description in subject-position. If this is correct, then the Wittgensteinian 'Theory of Descriptions' in the "Tractatus" may be pointed out on the basis of the analysis of statements about complexes.

According to aphorism 2.0201, every proposition about complexes can be resolved into the logical articulation of the two following sorts of propositions<sup>1</sup>: i) a proposition about the constituents of the complex; ii) propositions that describe the complex completely. But what does each of the above expressions mean? And what is the logical connective that articulates these propositions? I believe the answers may be given as follows.

First, it is worth noticing that when a propositional element signifies a complex, there is an indeterminateness in the propositions containing the element (1922b: 3.24). But the indeterminateness can be eliminated by contracting the expression for the complex into a simple symbol. This is made by means of a definition (id.). And the definition is obtained by the complete analysis of the proposition. A proposition admits one and only one complete analysis (1922b: 3.25). Thus, the 'proposition about the constituents of the complex' is

a proposition such that: i) the former expression for the complex is replaced by as many simple symbols as required by the analysis; ii) every simple symbol obtained is a primitive sign (name), that is, a sign that cannot be dissected any further by means of a definition (1922b: 3.26); iii) the proposition about the complex stands in an internal relation to any proposition containing a corresponding primitive sign (1922b: 3.24). The primitive signs must be possible so that the sense of a proposition be determinate (1922b: 3.23). Thus, if the complex does not exist, the proposition containing it will not be nonsensical, but simply false (1922b: 3.24; 5.4733).

Second, although the "Tractatus" is pretty unclear about the meaning of 'propositions that describe the complex completely', it is reasonable to assume that these propositions correspond to the conjunction of the existence clause and the uniqueness clause of the Russellian paraphrase. Against this, one might object that Wittgenstein's analysis is different from Russell's, as it may be inferred from the following remark in the "Notes on Logic":

"To repeat: every proposition which seems to be about a complex can be analyzed into a proposition about its constituents and about the proposition which describes the complex perfectly; i.e. that proposition which is equivalent to saying the complex exists" (1913b: 99).

The expression used here is 'proposition which describes the complex perfectly', and this is different from the one in question. But earlier in the same paragraph, Wittgenstein uses 'proposition which describes the complex *completely*'. Thus, as he is now repeating a previous statement, there is enough ground for assuming that both expressions are synonymous. If so, the proposition which describes the complex completely seems to be equivalent to a proposition affirming that the complex exists, but not

that it is unique. Consequently, the Wittgensteinian paraphrase would be different from the Russellian one.

In my opinion, this interpretation would be quite misleading. For if the uniqueness clause is not included, the proposition describing the complex completely would not do its job properly. True, the above passage suggests that the "proposition about the proposition which describes the complex completely" is a "proposition about the proposition which is equivalent to saying the complex exists". The passage is rather obscure, but it may be interpreted as stating that the "proposition which is equivalent to saying that the complex exists" corresponds to the usual Russellian analysis involving existence and uniqueness, and paraphrases the ordinary language proposition which affirms the complex exists. In support of this claim, I may recall the previously mentioned 1913 letter to Russell, in which the correctness of the Theory of Descriptions is clearly stated. Here, the divergence between Wittgenstein and Russell concerns the nature of the primitive signs, and not the adequacy of the Russellian paraphrase. Consequently, it seems reasonable to infer that, in the "Tractatus" the proposition which describes the complex completely involves the conjunction of an existence clause and a uniqueness clause<sup>2</sup>.

Thirdly, and finally, another passage from the paragraph above quoted clarifies the issue of the logical connective involved in the analysis of the proposition containing the complex in subject-position:

"Every statement about complexes can be resolved into the *logical product* of a statement about the constituents and a statement about the proposition which describes the complex completely" (1913b: 99; italics mine).

Thus, the proposition in question is analyzed into the usual Russellian paraphrase.

So far, if one excludes the remark about individual primitive signs in the 1913 letter, one may affirm that Wittgenstein's analysis is very similar to Russell's. But the 1913 remark cannot be left aside in the proper analysis of the Tractarian 'Theory of Descriptions'. In fact, the remark suggests that Wittgenstein not only adopted the Theory of Descriptions, but also modified it in the "Tractatus". What is more, the remark seems to express, though obscurely, the essentials of the modification. By this I mean that the 1913 reference to primitive simple signs suggests that most of the modifications are connected with an alteration of the general framework within which the Theory is to be viewed. And given that the theory of primitive simple signs is a cornerstone in Wittgenstein's early philosophy, the altered form of the Theory of Descriptions announced in 1913 is likely to have persisted in the "Tractatus". Now what is the meaning of the 1913 remark?

According to the Tractarian view, any descriptive language requires the existence of a fully analyzed language. The latter is a transcendental condition of possibility of the former. The fully analyzed language is composed of elementary propositions which are combinations of primitive simple signs. It is a logically perfect language. But the logical connectives belonging to such a language are not Frege's and Russell's 'primitive signs'. In fact, ' $\forall$ ', ' $\Rightarrow$ ', etc., are interdefinable, and this is enough to show that they are not primitive signs (1922b: 5.42). In addition, the logical form of the elementary propositions is unknown, and it need not have the slightest similarity with the subject-predicate form of ordinary language, or Frege's "Begriffsschrift", or Russell's formal language of "Principia". We are unable to give the composition of elementary propositions, although we may have some concept of elementary propositions independently of their logical form (1922b: 5.55; 5.555).

It is the application of logic that decides what elementary propositions there are (1922b: 5.557). The only thing we are able to say is that the definiteness of sense of any descriptive language transcendently requires a one to one correspondence between each proposition of the descriptive language and a set of elementary propositions belonging to the fully analyzed language. Thus, it is true that the Russellian paraphrase shows the real logical form of a proposition containing a definite description in subject-position. But the paraphrase does not represent the final stage in the Tractarian analysis. Actually, the application of the latter would lead to the elementary propositions of the logically perfect language. With some minor alterations, Russell's formal language of "Principia" would be only an intermediary stage of the complete Wittgensteinian analysis.

The above seems to be a reasonable interpretation of Wittgenstein's claim that the primitive signs in the Theory of Descriptions are quite different from what Russell believes them to be. But the result is that not only Russell, but also Wittgenstein does not know what are the primitive simple signs. Thus, Wittgenstein's logically perfect language is only an implicit condition of possibility of any descriptive language, whereas Russell's formal language is clearly explicit in "Principia". To put it more clearly, suppose a declarative sentence containing a definite description in subject-position. It is well-known that Russell's Theory of Descriptions exhibits the full analysis of the sentence by means of the formal language of "Principia". By contrast, the Tractarian Theory assumes that the full analysis of the sentence is a transcendental condition of possibility of the sentence's making sense. In other words, the Tractarian full analysis is only *postulated*, not exhibited. And its result might be an articulation of elementary propositions which would be completely



different from the Russellian paraphrase. This is an important difference between the two Theories.

But the above is not the only modification Wittgenstein imposed on the Russellian framework. There are other alterations which also seem to have an effect on the Theory of Descriptions. The most important of the Tractarian alterations are: i) the account of descriptions in terms of two-place or even n-place predicates; ii) the rejection of the identity sign; iii) the dissociation of generality from truth-functions; iv) the refusal of the axiomatic method. In what follows, I shall discuss these alterations one by one.

Firstly, there is the fact that, unlike Russell, Wittgenstein was particularly interested in analyzing descriptions into propositional functions involving two-place predicates. This is suggested by Kenny (1980: 80 ff.). Along the same line of argument, Kenny previously discussed the example:

- (1) 'Austria-Hungary is allied to Russia' (1980: 39).

Of course, 'Austria-Hungary' may be paraphrased as 'Austria is united to Hungary' and thus symbolized as 'aRb', namely an instance of the two-place predicate 'xRy'. Furthermore, 'x is allied to Russia' may be symbolized as 'Gx'. Kenny appeals to a pattern laid down in the "Notebooks", according to which (1) would be equivalent to

- (2) 'Austria is allied to Russia,  
and  
Hungary is allied to Russia,  
and  
Austria is united to Hungary',

or, in symbols,

(3) 'Ga & Gb & aRb'

which is equivalent to the Wittgensteinian analysis

(4) 'G[aRb]' (1914-6: 4).

Kenny also remarks that the later Wittgenstein's criticism of the "Tractatus" confirms the pattern. For the example criticised by Wittgenstein in the "Philosophical Investigations" is the Tractarian analysis of 'my broom is in the corner'. This sentence is taken as equivalent to 'my broomstick is in the corner, and my brush is in the corner, and the broomstick is fitted in the brush' (Wittgenstein 1953 I: 39; 60; Kenny 1980: 39; 80).

Thus, Kenny continues, in the case of

(5) 'The King of France is bald',

'x is king of France' is an instance of 'x is king of z' and may be symbolised as 'xRa', where 'a' stands for 'France'. Consequently, the Tractarian analysis of the existence and uniqueness clauses yields 'there is an x such that xRa, and it is not the case that there is an x and an y such that xRa and yRa'. And Kenny thinks that this pattern of analysis can be applied to all possible combinations of names or descriptions taken as the terms of a relation. Thus, the pattern can be applied to expressions of the forms: i) description-relation-name (ex.: 'the man who rules France'); ii) description-relation-description (ex.: the man in the moon); iii) name-relation-name (ex.: 'Austria-Hungary') (1980: 79). Kenny's suggestion seems to be very well in harmony with the Tractarian system. Now this reveals a possible point of divergence between the Tractarian Theory of

Descriptions and the Russellian one.

Second, Wittgenstein rejects the sign of identity in the Tractarian system. He considers identity as a mere representational device (1922b: 4.242). In fact, an identity is a rule for the interchangeability of signs. As a result, neither expressions of the form 'a = a' nor those derived from them have sense at all (1922b: 4.243). And as the same proper name cannot appear on both sides of the identity-sign, it follows that identity is not a relation between objects. A proposition like '(x) (fx ==> x=a)' says that only 'a' satisfies the function 'fx', and not that only objects which are identical with 'a' satisfy the function 'fx' (1922b: 5.5301). In fact, to say of two things that they are identical with each other is nonsense, and to say of one thing that it is identical with itself is to say nothing whatsoever (1922b: 5.5303). Wittgenstein replaces Russell's '(x) (fx ==> x=a)', by '(Ex)(fx ==> fa) & -(Ex,y) (fx & fy)' (1922b: 5.5321). Thus, suppose the sentence to be analyzed is

(6) 'f((ix)(Fx))'.

The Russellian analysis yields

(7) 'f((ix)(Fx)) = (Ex)(y)((Fy <==> y=x) & fx) Df',

whereas the Wittgensteinian analysis yields

(8) 'f((ix)(Fx)) = (Ex)(Fx & -(Ex)(Ey)(Fx&Fy) & fx) Df'.

In (8), '(Ex)(Fx & -(Ex)(Ey)(Fx&Fy))' means that only one 'x' satisfies the function 'Fx' (1922b: 5.5321), and 'fx' means that the 'x' in question satisfies the function 'fx'. The possibility of this replacement shows that the identity-sign is not an essential constituent of

conceptual notation (1922b: 5.533). This may be another possible point of divergence between the Tractarian system and the one of "Principia". In fact, Wittgenstein's views on identity seem to yield the most important modification imposed on the Russellian Theory of Descriptions.

Third, Wittgenstein gives an account of generality in the "Tractatus" which seems to be very different from Russell's. And this is complicated by the obscurity of the Tractarian account. The general propositions seem to be related to elementary propositions in a peculiar and obscure way.

On the one hand, Wittgenstein argues that a proposition is a truth-function of elementary propositions (1922b: 5). As a result, general propositions must be truth-functions of elementary propositions. In conformity with this, Wittgenstein seems to define general propositions in terms of conjunctions and disjunctions. For example, if all the values of a function 'fx' for all values of 'x' are the values of Wittgenstein's function ' $\xi$ ', then  $N(\bar{\xi}) = -(Ex)fx$  (1922b: 5.52). Hence,  $N(\bar{\xi}) = (x)-fx$ . This means that both '(Ex)' and '(x)' are defined in terms of conjunctions of negations of propositions (Cf. 1922b: 5.502; 5.51). Since conjunction and disjunction are interdefinable by means of De Morgan's law, both quantifiers may also be defined in terms of disjunctions of negations of propositions. Thus, general propositions can be seen as truth-functions of conjunctions or disjunctions of elementary propositions. In other words, general propositions are introduced in connexion with logical sum and logical product.

On the other hand, Wittgenstein strikingly claims that the concept *all* is to be dissociated from truth-functions (1922b: 5.521). He argues that Frege and Russell introduced generality in connexion with logical

sum or logical product. True, both ideas are involved by the propositions ' $(x)fx$ ' and ' $(Ex)fx$ ', but introducing generality in connexion with them makes it difficult to understand such propositions (id.). In order to justify this point, Wittgenstein obscurely claims that general propositions are like *logical prototypes* which give prominence to constants (1922b: 5.522). The generality-sign occurs as an argument (1922b: 5.523). Besides, if some elementary propositions are given, then at the same time *all* elementary propositions will be given (1922b: 5.524). And we can describe the world completely by using only general propositions (1922b: 5.526). It is not easy to understand Wittgenstein's point about generality in 5.521-5.5262, but he seems to suggest that the general proposition is a prototype which shows the logical form which is common to all its instances. If this is correct, then 5.521-5.5262 seems to square ill both with 5.52 and aphorism 5, on which the passage is a comment. The universal and the existential quantifier seem to be able to specify the truth operation of the propositions which are their instances without necessarily recurring to truth-operations. This looks like a contradiction.

Now suppose there is no contradiction at all and that Wittgenstein is in fact offering a valid alternative to the alleged Russellian association of generality with logical product or logical sum. In this case, he would be altering the way generality plays a role in the construction of the fully analyzed language. Since the Theory of Descriptions involves recourse to generality, it might happen that Wittgenstein's modification also involves an alteration of a basic feature of the Theory.

Fourth, there is Wittgenstein's refusal of the axiomatic method in the "Tractatus". For the method has to establish a number of primitive propositions from which the others are derived. This expedient is misleading,



because in logic there is no proposition which is essentially primitive or essentially derived. All propositions of logic have the same status (1922b: 6.127). Thus, the number of primitive propositions in the system of "Principia Mathematica", for example, is completely arbitrary (1922b: 6.1271). What is more, it is always possible to construct a logic in a way such that every proposition is its own proof (1922b: 6.1265). Wittgenstein's method of truth-tables may be viewed as an attempt of this sort (1922b: 6.1203). Thus, on Wittgenstein's account, declarative sentences containing descriptions in subject-position are not to be derived from others. If necessary, one can just check whether the sentence in question is a tautology or not by means of the method of truth-tables. Once again, this is another point of possible divergence with Russell's Theory of Descriptions.

The above list shows the most important alterations Wittgenstein imposes on the general framework of Russell's formal language of "Principia". Now the question is how far these alterations go from a purely logical standpoint. In other words, do the modifications discussed yield a Tractarian Theory of Descriptions which is logically different from the Russellian one? The answer to this question will be given in the next section.

### III - THE TRACTARIAN THEORY OF DESCRIPTIONS SEEMS TO COMPARE WITH RUSSELL'S

In this section, I shall discuss the logical consequences of each of the modifications above listed. If the consequences are such that they yield results which are logically different from the system of "Principia", then we may speak of a Tractarian Theory of Descriptions

as an original alternative to the Russellian one. However, if the consequences are such that they yield the same logical results as the ones yielded by "Principia", then we must admit that the Tractarian Theory of Descriptions is not an alternative to the Russellian one. The forthcoming analysis will decide which of the above alternatives is true. For the sake of clearness, I shall analyze the consequences of each Wittgensteinian modification in the same order as they were presented in the previous section.

Initially, there is the fact that, in conformity with the 1913 remark, the Tractarian primitive simple signs are not the Russellian ones. Let us call the Tractarian fully analyzed language 'W-language' and Russell's formal language in "Principia" 'R-language'. The former does not seem to correspond to the latter. The R-language is explicitly elaborated, whereas the W-language is only postulated and constitutes the transcendental condition of possibility of any descriptive language.

The R-language was obtained by analyzing ordinary language and is intended to give the correct logical form of the propositions of ordinary language. But then the R-language may be seen either as an intermediary stage in the analysis going from ordinary language to the W-language or as a descriptive language of which the W-language is the transcendental condition of possibility. Now if both the R- and W-language had the same expressive power and were logically equivalent, one might paraphrase Wittgenstein's aphorism 5.5563 and say: "In fact, all the propositions of our R-language, just as they stand, are in perfect logical order". Thus, no adaptations would have to be made in "Principia" in order to make valid its correspondence with the W-language. If this were possible, the fact that the primitive simple signs of the W-language are not the ones belonging to the R-language does not

clash with the basic correctness of the logical order of the R-language. And here we would be back to Wittgenstein's 1913 remark, which tells us that, although the primitive simple signs are not what Russell believes them to be, the Theory of Descriptions is *quite undoubtedly* right.

As it will be shown in what follows, the R- and the W-language have the same expressive power and there is at least one interpretation under which both languages may be proved to be logically equivalent. If this is correct, then the 1913 remark may be interpreted in a way such that although the W-language involves an alteration of the general framework of the R-language, the logical results of both languages are the same and the Tractarian Theory of Descriptions is logically equivalent to the Russellian one. This may be proved by the discussion of the other alterations Wittgenstein imposes to the logical framework of the R-language. This is what I shall do in the sequel.

First, there is the question concerning Wittgenstein's account of descriptions in terms of two-place or even n-place predicates. This is clearly equivalent to the Russellian account as long as it is possible to analyze the expressions involved as two-place or even n-place predicates. Now this is only a matter of convenience, and does not involve any essential difference. As a result, the first Wittgensteinian modification does not yield logical results which are different from the ones yielded by "Principia".

Second, there is the problem of Wittgenstein's rejection of the identity sign in his analysis of descriptions in subject-position. Now this modification does not make the Tractarian system something radically different from the Russellian system of "Principia". As a matter of fact, even Wittgenstein's treatment of identity

in the "Tractatus" may yield a system which is logically equivalent to "Principia". But this can be made only with some qualifications, because the account of (8) according to the methods and processes established by "Principia Mathematica" would yield disappointing results. For example, a contradiction may be derived from (8) in the following way:

1.  $(\exists x)(Fx \ \& \ \neg(\exists x)(\exists y)(Fx \ \& \ Fy) \ \& \ Bx)$  [(3) taken as a premise].
2.  $Fa \ \& \ \neg(\exists x)(\exists y)(Fx \ \& \ Fy) \ \& \ Ba$  [1, existential instantiation].
3.  $Fa \ \& \ (\forall x)(\forall y)\neg(Fx \ \& \ Fy) \ \& \ Ba$  [2, equivalence].
4.  $Fa \ \& \ (\forall y)\neg(Fa \ \& \ Fy) \ \& \ Ba$  [3, universal instantiation].
5.  $Fa \ \& \ \neg(Fa \ \& \ Fa) \ \& \ Ba$  [4, universal instantiation].
6.  $Fa \ \& \ \neg Fa \ \& \ Ba$  [5, equivalence].
7.  $Fa \ \& \ \neg Fa$  [6, simplification].

Thus, if treated according to Russellian patterns, the Wittgensteinian analysis of definite descriptions in subject-position seems to collapse into contradiction. Could it be that, contrary to Wittgenstein's thought in the "Tractatus", identity is such an essential sign in logic that we cannot dispense with it?

Fortunately for Wittgenstein's account, this does not seem to be so. In fact, in an interesting 1956 paper, "Identity, Variables and Impredicative Definitions", Hintikka follows the Tractarian suggestion and succeeds in constructing a logic without identity. Hintikka's main point is that variables can be used in a twofold way. First, we may use them in a way such that coincidences of the values of different variables are not excluded. This is what Hintikka calls the *inclusive interpretation* of variables (1956: 226). Second, we may

use them in a way such that coincidences of the values of different variables are excluded. This is what Hintikka calls the *exclusive interpretation* of variables (id.). The latter may be either weakly or strongly exclusive (1956: 230).

Now Hintikka suggests that Wittgenstein adopts the weakly exclusive interpretation of variables in the "Tractatus" (1956: 228; 230). In support of his claim, Hintikka quotes the aphorisms 5.53-5.5352, where Wittgenstein is mainly discussing identity. Hintikka also proves that everything expressible by the inclusive quantifiers plus identity may be expressed by the weakly exclusive quantifiers without a sign for identity (1956: 235). Thus, he thinks the Tractarian claim that identity is not an essential constituent of logical notation is correct (id.). But he adds an important proviso: although the inclusive interpretation is to be preferred in English, it is clear that, without recourse to context, there is no intuition definite enough to allow deciding which interpretation is appropriate for an English sentence involving quantifiers (1956: 227).

I think Hintikka is undoubtedly correct in his claim. In fact, most of the Tractarian discussion on identity supports a weakly exclusive interpretation of variables. What is more, there is another important passage that may be quoted in support of Wittgenstein's weakly exclusive interpretation of variables. It is in the "Notebooks". Here, he writes:

"I believe that it would be possible wholly to exclude the sign of identity from our notation and always to indicate identity merely by the identity of the signs (in certain circumstances). In that case, of course,  $F(a,a)$  would not be a special case of  $(x,y).F(x,y)$ , and  $Fa$  would not be a special case of  $(Ex,y).Fx.Fy$ . But then instead of  $Fx.Fy \rightarrow x,y x=y$  one could simply write  $-(Ex,y).Fx.Fy$ " (1914-6: 34; italics mine).



If for example 'Faa' is not an instance of ' $(x)(y)Fxy$ ', this is because Wittgenstein's use of variables is undoubtedly exclusive. But then it is possible to lay down a rule for transforming an expression belonging to the W-language into an expression belonging to the R-language and vice versa. For example, suppose ' $(EEx)$ ' and ' $(UEx)$ ' stand for a weakly exclusive interpretation respectively of the existentially and the universally quantified variables. In this case, the Tractarian expression ' $(UEx)(UEy)Fxy$ ' would involve the requirement that 'x' should be different from 'y'. Thus, the mere addition of the clause ' $x \neq y$ ' transforms the Tractarian expression into a Russellian one: ' $(UEx)(UEy)Fxy$ ' is equivalent to ' $(x)(y)(Fxy \ \& \ x \neq y)$ ', or, with existential quantifiers, to ' $\neg (Ex)(Ey)(x=y \vee \neg Fxy)$ '.

The above procedure is generalized by Hintikka. He formulates translation rules by means of which the exclusive quantifiers may be paraphrased in terms of ' $(Ex)$ ' and ' $(x)$ ' (1956: 231). Hintikka's transformation rules seem to provide an adequate method for translating Tractarian expressions into Russellian ones and vice versa<sup>3</sup>. If this is correct, (8) should be expressed by weakly exclusive variables, thus yielding:

$$(9) \ '(EEx)(Fx \ \& \ Bx \ \& \ \neg (EEx)(EEy)(Fx \ \& \ Fy))'$$

If one now applies Hintikka's transformation rules to (9), one obtains

$$(10) \ '(Ex)(Fx \ \& \ Bx \ \& \ \neg (Ex)(Ey)(x \neq y \ \& \ (Fx \ \& \ Fy)))'$$

Although not with the help of explicit Wittgensteinian rules for dealing with truth-tables involving quantification, it may be easily proved that (10) is equivalent to the Russellian paraphrase, namely

(11)'(Ex)(Fx & (y)(Fy ==> y=x) & Bx)'<sup>4</sup>.

Therefore, the Russellian account of (8) is inadequate, because it misleadingly assumes that the Wittgensteinian variable is to be interpreted in the same way as the variables of "Principia Mathematica". Thus, the disappointing results are not the true ones. Besides, the equivalences obtained within Hintikka's composite formal system in fact confirm Wittgenstein's claim that the identity-sign is not an essential constituent of logical notation (Hintikka 1956: 230, fn. 11; 235). The main result of the above discussion is that the Tractarian system has the same expressive power of "Principia". And this fact increases the possibility that both systems are logically equivalent. Therefore, as far as identity is concerned, the Wittgensteinian modification of the general framework of the Theory of Descriptions does not alter its basic logical aspects. And an alleged divergence between the Tractarian Theory of Descriptions and the Russellian one reveals to be a possible source for the logical equivalence between the two Theories.

Third, there is the difficult question of Wittgenstein's obscure and apparently contradictory account of generality in the "Tractatus". As already mentioned, generality seems to have a twofold character in the Tractarian system. The general propositions seem to be at the same time logical prototypes and truth-functions of elementary propositions. In what follows, I shall argue that, despite the appearance of contradiction, this may be explained in a coherent way. In addition, I believe one may propose at least one interpretation of the generalized propositions in a way such that the Tractarian system may be proved equivalent to the system of "Principia". The interpretation is based on the one found in Russell's "Introduction" to the "Tractatus".

The fact that a general proposition is a logical prototype may be explained in the following way. We know that: i) an 'expression' is any part of a proposition that characterizes its sense (1922b: 3.31); ii) a proposition is an expression (id.). Given these definitions, suppose we turn a constituent of a proposition into a variable. For example, suppose we turn the argument 'John' in the proposition 'John sleeps' into the variable 'x', thus obtaining 'x sleeps'. Wittgenstein calls this a 'variable proposition' (cf. 3.315), but according to aphorism 3.314, 'x sleeps' may be also interpreted as a propositional variable. In this case, 'x sleeps' specifies a class of propositions all of which are its values. But here the class specified depends on the conventional meaning of the expression 'sleeps'. If we now turn the latter into an adequate variable, say 'Yx', we shall still obtain a propositional variable which determines a class of propositions of the same kind as the above mentioned. The class determined by 'Yx' does not depend on any conventional meaning, but solely on the nature of the proposition formerly expressed by 'John sleeps' (cf. 1922b: 3.315). In this case, 'Yx' corresponds to a *logical prototype* (id.).

Now the proposition 'John sleeps' also allows the construction of quantified propositional variables, such as '(Ex)Yx', '(x)Yx' and so on. These propositional variables also correspond to logical prototypes. The peculiarity of the generalized propositions is that they both indicate logical prototypes and give prominence to constants (1922b: 5.522). In the above examples, the logical form is the constant to which prominence is given.

If this is correct, then the construction of generalized propositions through the procedure of replacing expressions by variables does not involve the appeal to truth-functions. This coheres with the

Tractarian claim that propositions comprise all that follows from the totality of all elementary propositions (1922b: 4.52). For the construction of logical prototypes follows from the totality of all elementary propositions. That is why Wittgenstein also claims that, in a certain sense, all propositions may be taken as generalizations of elementary propositions (id.).

The above interpretation explains Wittgenstein's claim that he dissociates the concept 'all' from truth-functions. But the fact that generalized propositions are also truth-functions of elementary propositions remains to be explained. This is connected with the Tractarian claim that the logical product and logical sum are notions *embedded* in the propositions ' $(x)fx$ ' and ' $(Ex)fx$ ' (1922b: 5.521). Wittgenstein claims that the analysis of a proposition must bring us to elementary propositions (1922b: 4.221) and that a proposition is a truth-function of elementary propositions (1922b: 5). What is more, elementary propositions themselves contain *all* logical operations (1922b: 5.47), and this includes the quantifiers. These principles are general enough to be applied to generalized propositions. But then these propositions will also reveal themselves to be truth-functions of elementary propositions. Thus, although a generalized proposition may be constructed independently of truth-functions, the valuation of the generalized proposition will have to take us back to truth-functions. Now the question is: in what sense? The answer to this may be given as follows:

i) Once one obtains a logical prototype through the procedure of replacing expressions in a proposition by the corresponding variables, one stipulates the propositions which are the values of the propositional variable expressed by the logical prototype. The stipulation is made by means of the common logical form of

the propositions stipulated. This is a purely syntactic procedure and constitutes the basis for establishing a logical equivalence between the prototype and a logical articulation of the propositions specified by the prototype (1922b: 3.316-7). This seems to be similar to Russell's interpretation in his "Introduction" to the "Tractatus" (1922b: xv). A similar interpretation is found in Fogelin (1976: 57).

ii) Once the stipulation is made, the truth-value of the logical prototype will be calculated by means of the truth-values of the propositions which are the values of the propositional variable expressed by the prototype. This coheres with the Tractarian claim that

"If we are given a proposition, then with it we are also given the results of all truth-operations that have it as their base" (1922b: 5.442).

Thus, in the case of a proposition involving, say, the universal quantifier, the logical prototype obtained will be true if and only if all the propositions belonging to the set specified by the prototype are true (cf. 1922b: 5.52). Therefore, the proposition ' $(x)fx$ ' will be equivalent to the logical product of the propositions belonging to the set specified by the prototype. As for a proposition involving the existential quantifier, the logical prototype obtained will be true if and only if at least one of the propositions belonging to the set specified by the prototype is true. Therefore, the proposition ' $(Ex)fx$ ' will be equivalent to the logical sum of the propositions belonging to the set specified by the prototype. This situation takes us from the prototype to truth-functions. For the generalized propositions, although constructed on the basis of the symbolism alone and independently of truth-functions, are ultimately equivalent to logical conjunctions or disjunctions of the propositions belonging to the sets specified by the



prototypes obtained. The propositions belonging to the sets specified by the prototypes may in turn be fully analyzed into elementary propositions. In this way, a generalized proposition may be fully analyzed in a way such that it specifies a set of elementary propositions and is a truth-function of a logical sum or a logical product of the elementary propositions involved. This would explain Wittgenstein's claim that the logical product and the logical sum are *embedded* in generality (1922b: 5521). Simultaneously, this would reveal that Russell's suggestion that Wittgenstein *derives* general propositions from conjunctions and disjunctions (1922b: xvi) is not entirely correct. Actually, Wittgenstein needs conjunctions or disjunctions in order to assign a truth-value to a general proposition, not to construct it: the logical prototype is obtained by merely introducing the adequate variables.

Against the above interpretation, one might argue in the following way. As a logical prototype, the generalized proposition contains variables. But then its final analysis will still contain variables. Thus, it will always leave something undetermined (1922b: 3.24). In other words, the analysis of the generalized proposition will not take us directly to articulations of elementary propositions containing primitive simple signs, but only to articulations of propositional variables containing variables which stand for primitive simple signs. Therefore, the indeterminateness of the generalized proposition would make it impossible for the proposition to be a truth-function of elementary propositions.

I would reply to this as follows. The indeterminateness notwithstanding, the generalized proposition clearly specifies a set of propositions and is a truth-function of the propositions belonging to the set. True, the final stage of the analysis of the generalized

proposition would take us to propositional variables which would contain variables for simple signs. But the resulting propositional variables would still specify sets of elementary propositions. Thus, the generalized proposition may be also seen as a truth-function of elementary propositions. What is more, this squares with the Tractarian general principle that a proposition is a truth-function of elementary propositions (1922b: 5). As a result, the generalized proposition reveals to be perfectly capable of describing the world.

This may also be inferred from aphorism 5.526, where Wittgenstein states that we can describe the world completely by means of fully generalized propositions. For a non-fully generalized proposition is simply a stage in the construction of a fully generalized one. Thus, a proposition like  $'(Ex)(Ey)Yx'$  differs from  $'(Ex)fx'$  in that the set of propositions specified by the former is wider than the one specified by the latter. But the latter also describes a situation and as such may be compared with reality. As for indeterminateness, compare a proposition like  $'(Ex)fx'$  with  $'(Ex)fx \ \& \ x=a'$ . The former is more indeterminate than the latter. Despite this, the former describes the world (in the Tractarian sense) as accurately as the latter if both are true. As a matter of fact, if  $'(Ex)fx'$  is a true Tractarian description of the world, it depicts an existing state of affairs and shows the logical structure of the state of affairs within the logical space, thus mirroring the essence of the world; if  $'(Ex)fx \ \& \ x=a'$  is true, it adds to this an extra piece of information, that is  $'x=a'$ , which is a matter of detail and does not add anything relevant to the Tractarian description of the world made by  $'(Ex)fx'$ . The essence of the world is logic. In order to describe the world in the Tractarian way, we only need to know that there are objects in the world, not which objects there are. Thus, although our customary mode of expression is rather made

by means of  $(\text{Ex})fx \ \& \ x=a$ , there is nothing wrong with the indeterminateness of  $(\text{Ex})fx$  from the standpoint of a true Tractarian description of the world.

If the above interpretation is correct, we now have to see how generality works in propositions containing definite descriptions in subject-position. This is connected with the Tractarian analysis of propositions containing a sign for a complex (1922b: 3.24-3.261). In this respect, Wittgenstein makes the following claims.

i) The analysis of a proposition containing the sign for a complex is not arbitrary. In fact,

"A proposition has one and only one complete analysis" (1922b: 3.25).

This is reinforced by another aphorism:

"Nor does analysis resolve the sign for a complex in an arbitrary way: for instance, it would not have a different resolution every time that it was incorporated in a different proposition" (1922b: 3.3442).

The above principle may be applied to propositions containing definite descriptions in subject-position. For the description is a sign for a complex. As a result, a proposition containing a definite description in subject-position will have one and only one complete analysis.

ii) The complete analysis of a proposition containing the sign for a complex will involve propositions about constituents of the complex and propositions that describe the complex completely (1922b: 2.201). This seems to be confirmed by the following aphorism:

"A proposition about a complex stands in an internal relation to a proposition about a constituent of the complex" (1922b: 3.24).

Although the aphorism is obscure, I shall argue that it reinforces 2.201. In order to justify my claim, I shall offer the following reasons:  $ii_a$ ) the relation between the proposition about a complex and the proposition about the constituent of the complex is *internal*, and this means that the analysis of the former would take us necessarily to the latter;  $ii_b$ ) the symbol for a complex is dissected into a simple symbol by means of a definition, thus signifying via the signs that serve to define it (the definitions point the way) (1922b: 3.24; 3.261);  $ii_c$ ) as already mentioned, Wittgenstein explicitly adhered to the Theory of Descriptions in the Tractarian period, and this entails that he would assume that the analysis of a proposition containing the sign for a complex would involve a proposition about a constituent of the complex;  $ii_d$ ) my interpretation coheres with the Tractarian claim that the proposition about the complex will not be nonsensical, but simply false if there is no set of constituents linked in a way such that they satisfy the description of the complex (1922b: 3.24). Now given that a complex can be given only by its description (*id.*), the above principle clearly applies to propositions containing definite descriptions in subject-position.

My interpretation also coheres with Wittgenstein's claim that the proposition containing the sign for a complex leaves something undetermined, just like it occurs with the generality sign (*id.*). But this does not entail that the proposition containing the sign for a complex will not be a truth-function of elementary propositions. In fact, the analysis of the proposition about the complex will involve generalized propositions and so the former will be a truth-function of elementary propositions in the same sense as the latter.

As a result, the Tractarian account of a proposition containing a definite description in subject-position, say 'the F is P' may be summarized as follows. The analysis of 'The F is P' will involve propositions about the constituents of 'The F' and propositions that describe 'The F' completely. These propositions are generalized, thus involving some indeterminateness. But this does not impede such propositions of being truth-functions of elementary propositions. In fact, the final analysis of 'The F is P' will be such that it will involve at least one generalized proposition of the form 'there is an x such that...'. The latter will specify a set of elementary propositions and will be a truth-function of the elementary propositions belonging to the set. If 'The F' does not exist, all the elementary propositions belonging to the set specified will be false. Thus, 'The F is P' will be false if 'The F' does not exist. In turn, if 'the F' does exist, then 'The F is P' will be either true or false depending on the adequacy of the predicate 'is P' to the complex involved. Thus, 'The F is P' is an authentic proposition that contains everything which is relevant for an accurate Tractarian description of the world.

If this is correct, then the Tractarian general propositions would be logically equivalent to the ones belonging to the classical first order predicate calculus with bound variables. So, as far as generality is concerned, Wittgenstein's TLP- and W-language are logically equivalent to Russell's R-language.

Fourth, we have to consider Wittgenstein's rejection of Russell's axiomatic method in "Principia". The fact is that, although Wittgenstein accuses the axiomatic method of being misleading, the Tractarian system seems to be logically equivalent to the system of "Principia". In fact, we already know that both systems



have the same expressive power. This means that we can make a correspondence between the true propositions of both systems in a way such that: i) to every true proposition of the Tractarian system there corresponds one true proposition of the system of "Principia"; ii) to every true proposition of the R-language there corresponds one true proposition of the W-language.

Now this suggests that the above systems may be logically equivalent. Consider the propositional calculus involved by both systems. It is a well-known fact that every axiom and every theorem of the propositional calculus is a tautology and that every tautology is either an axiom or a theorem of the propositional calculus (Chauvineau 1962: 100-6). Ultimately, this means that: i) if a proposition of the propositional calculus is an axiom or theorem in the R-language, then it is a tautology in the TLP-language; ii) if a proposition of the propositional calculus is a tautology in the TLP-language, then it is an axiom or a theorem in the R-language. In other words, the R-language contains the propositional calculus in its axiomatic version, whereas the TLP-language contains the same calculus in its tautological version. Therefore, a proposition of the propositional calculus is an axiom or a theorem in the R-language if and only if it is a tautology in the TLP-language. Now consider the predicate calculus involved by both the above systems. As already mentioned, the Tractarian general propositions seem to be logically equivalent to the ones belonging to the classical first order predicate calculus with bound variables.

Although the conjunction of these facts is not enough to prove that the TLP-language is logically equivalent to the R-language, it clearly suggests that both languages contain significant domains which are logically equivalent. This fact makes the claim that both

languages may be logically equivalent a good conjecture. Given that the TLP-language is logically equivalent to the W-language, the Tractarian system would reveal itself to be logically equivalent to the system of "Principia". Even though the systems were not equivalent, their similarities seem to surmount greatly their discrepancies. The modifications imposed by Wittgenstein do not seem to alter the basic logical results obtained by Russell and the Tractarian Theory of Descriptions seems to be logically equivalent to the Russellian.

As a whole, the analysis of the Wittgensteinian modifications shows that the Tractarian system would not probably entail any radical alteration of the Russellian Theory of Descriptions. This result puts a significant part of the Tractarian system on a par with the first order predicate calculus with bound variables of "Principia". Of course, the decision of using one of these systems rather than the other is determined by practical reasons. And the preference given to the system of "Principia" speaks for itself.

In short, the early Wittgenstein's solution to the problem of semantic presuppositions generated by definite descriptions in subject-position seems to be ultimately equivalent to Russell's, although the general formal framework to which the solution belongs is different. But this is true under the following qualifications: i) the equivalence mentioned occurs basically within the domain of propositional calculus and first-order predicate calculus; ii) although correct, the Tractarian claim that identity is dispensable is dogmatically stated, not proved; iii) the possibility of constructing truth-tables for expressions involving quantifiers is also dogmatically stated, not proved. But the more important aspect of Wittgenstein's solution is that the basic result of Russell's Theory is preserved: a

proposition containing an empty description in subject-position is not nonsensical, but simply false (1922b: 3.24; 5.473).

The above is a disappointing result. But this is not the end of the matter. For we still must know what is the place the general concept of semantic presupposition as defined in the previous chapter may have within the Tractarian framework. In other words, Russell's theory of logically proper names is compatible with the view that descriptions are referring expressions which semantically presuppose in the sense of the general concept. Now what about the Tractarian system: is it compatible with the general concept of semantic presupposition or not? The answer to this question will require the analysis of how compatible with the general concept of semantic presupposition are some relevant parts of the Tractarian system. This task belongs to the next section.

#### IV - THE TRACTARIAN SYSTEM, THE SUB-SYSTEM W1 AND THE CONCEPT OF SEMANTIC PRESUPPOSITION

In this section, I shall try to show in which way the Tractarian system may be compatible with the logical relation of semantic presupposition. This will involve not only the analysis of the relationships between the general concept of semantic presupposition and the Tractarian system as a whole, but also the relationships between the concept in question and some relevant parts of the Tractarian system, such as the principle of strict bivalence and the Picture Theory. The expected result is a clarification of the various degrees in which some parts of the Tractarian system may be said to oppose the general concept of semantic presupposition.

First, consider the Tractarian system as a whole and its relations with the general concept of semantic presupposition. From this standpoint, the Tractarian system is undoubtedly incompatible with the relation of semantic presupposition. Of course, the mere adoption in the "Tractatus" of a modified version of Russell's Theory of Descriptions automatically excludes semantic presupposition as an explanation of the referential role of definite descriptions in subject-position.

Second, consider the system which results by eliminating the Theory of Descriptions from the Tractarian system. Let us call such an incomplete system 'W1'. In the W1 system, the referential role of definite descriptions in subject-position remains to be explained. Now suppose one adopts the general concept of semantic presupposition in order to explain how definite descriptions refer. This would lead to contradiction, for the W1 system contains another relevant part of the Tractarian system which is incompatible with the general concept of semantic presupposition. As already mentioned, one of the basic features of the general concept of semantic presupposition is the claim that the presupposing proposition is truth-valueless if the presupposed one is false. This contradicts the principle of strict bivalence which states that a proposition may be either true or false, but never truth-valueless. Now it is well-known that Wittgenstein adhered to the principle in question by the time he wrote the "Tractatus" (1913b: 94; 1914-6: 53; 56; 1922b: 2.21-2.223). Consequently, the W1 system is bound to oppose the general concept of presupposition, because this relation involves the existence of truth-valueless propositions. And this result may be extended to propositions containing definite descriptions in subject-position. Thus, the Theory of Descriptions would fit better the W1 system as a supplementary explanation of the referential role of definite descriptions in subject-position<sup>5</sup>.

But the relation of semantic presupposition may have another reading to be tested against the W1 system. For example, we may say that, if the presupposed proposition is false, then the presupposing utterance is no proposition at all. This is connected with one of the possible interpretations of Strawson's concept of semantic presupposition, but it may be used in order to construct a concept which is expressible within the W1 system. In this case, we would say that whenever there is a presuppositional failure, the presupposing declarative utterance is nonsensical. The reading I am suggesting may involve a problematic semantics, but I am not interested in the merits of such a semantics. What interests me is the fact that my reading involves an alternative relation of semantic presupposition that does not affect the Tractarian principle of bivalence. For a proposition with a sense would always be either true or false; only nonsensical sequences of signs would be truth-valueless. Now this raises the following question: given that, in the "Tractatus", Wittgenstein admits the existence of nonsensical utterances, would it not be the case that the W1 system admits the above version of semantic presupposition in order to explain the referential mechanism involved by definite descriptions in subject-position? Once again, the answer is no. In what follows, I shall try to show that the appeal to a relationship which is simultaneously an instance of the general concept of semantic presupposition and expressible within the W1 system would be incompatible with such a system.

In order to make my point, I shall consider the following consecutive Tractarian aphorisms:

"2.0201 Every statement about complexes can be resolved into a statement about their constituents and into the propositions that describe the complexes completely.

"2.021 Objects make up the substance of the



world. That is why they cannot be composite.

"2.0211 If the world had no substance, then whether a proposition had sense would depend on whether another proposition was true.

"2.0212 In that case we could not sketch any picture of the world (true or false)".

The above argument purports to show the necessity of simple signs. It also involves definite descriptions in subject-position by means of the appeal to statements about complexes. But the interpretation of the argument is not a simple matter.

Black, for example, paraphrases the argument in the following way. If there were no simple objects, i.e. if the world had no substance, then the analysis of a statement involving a complex would have no end. For suppose  $S_1$  is a statement involving a complex; the sense of  $S_1$  would depend on the truth of another sentence, say  $S_2$ , affirming the existence of the complex contained in  $S_1$ ; but then the sense of  $S_2$  would depend on the truth of another statement, say  $S_3$ , and so on. We would be facing a vicious regress ad infinitum, and we could never grasp the sense of  $S_1$  without previously knowing an infinity of other propositions to be true. Thus, unless there are simple signs in direct connexion with simple objects in the world, there can be no signs in indirect connexion either (1964: 60).

Fogelin, in turn, thinks that 2.0201 lays down a criterion of sense according to which a statement about a complex can be resolved into a set of statements about the complex's constituents and describing the complex completely. And he interprets Wittgenstein's argument as concluding that we cannot deny the existence of simples. For if a statement containing a complex is resolved by analysis into another statement containing another complex, the latter would still require analysis; if

further analysis still yields a statement containing a complex, more analysis will be required. But if we never could reach a statement containing no complex at all, analysis would never end and the criterion of sense would never be fulfilled. In this case, we could not sketch a picture of the world (1976: 12-3). But Fogelin thinks his reading of the above argument squares ill with the following part of the aphorism 3.24:

"(...) A proposition that mentions a complex will not be nonsensical, if the complex does not exist, but simply false. (...)"

Here it seems that it is the truth and not the meaning of a proposition that depends upon the existence of simples. For this reason, Fogelin confesses he does not know how to square the argument in 2.0201-2.0212 with 3.24 (1976: 13).

Now I think it is possible to offer a different reading of the above argument. And this reading would involve both the theory of primitive simple signs and an instance of the general concept of semantic presupposition. The latter is necessary in order to construct a "presuppositional" relation which would be expressible in Tractarian terminology. In other words, I think it is possible to interpret Wittgenstein's argument as rejecting the relation of semantic presupposition on the basis of the requirements both of the Picture Theory and the requirement of primitive simple signs. In order to achieve this, some preliminary remarks must be made.

First, it seems clear that 2.0201 expresses, in Wittgenstein's own terminology, his adherence to the Theory of Descriptions.

Second, the argument to be discussed is expressed only by 2.0211-2.0212 ('hypothetical syllogism'). The remaining aphorisms in the passage

2.0201-2.0212, although they give some important additional information, do not belong to the argument itself.

Third, 2.0211 may be interpreted as laying down the following version of the relationship of semantic presupposition: a proposition, say 'P', semantically presupposes another proposition, say 'Q', if and only if 'P' has a sense when 'Q' is true. As a result, if 'Q' is false, then both 'P' and its negation are nonsensical. This seems to be an instance of the relationship of semantic presupposition expressed by the general concept. For if 'P' is nonsensical, 'P' has no truth-value. Thus, the relation laid down by 2.0211 may be defined as follows. 'P' semantically presupposes 'Q' if and only if: i) if 'P' is true or false, then 'Q' is true; ii) if 'not P' is false or true, then 'Q' is true; iii) if both 'P' and 'not P' have no truth-values, then 'Q' is false. True, the presupposing utterance still has a sense in both Strawson's and Frege's case. But this feature does not belong to the definition of the general concept of semantic presupposition. Thus, the fact that both 'P' and 'not P' are nonsensical when 'Q' is false does not affect the definition suggested by 2.0211 and makes such a definition an instance of the general concept. Wittgenstein seems to offer, within his own system and using his own terminology, a principle which would explain the possibility of a presuppositional relation in the hypothetical case the world had no substance.

Fourth, any existential proposition of the form ' $(\text{Ex})(\text{Fx} \ \& \ \text{-(Ex)(Ey)(\text{Fx} \ \& \ \text{Fy}))$ ' in the TLP-language is essentially bivalent. In other words, although some utterances are defined as nonsensical by the W1 system, this does not affect the existential propositions, for they always have a truth-value, even when the description involved is empty (in that case the proposition would be

false, and never nonsensical). If this is true, then a well-formed existential proposition always has a truth-value and never depends on the truth of another proposition for having a sense. This principle coheres with the Tractarian system in general and with the W1 system in particular.

Fifth, the argument expressed by 2.0211-2.0212 expresses a *reductio ad absurdum*, whereas 3.24 expresses the truth-conditions for a proposition about a complex. As a matter of fact, 2.0211-2.0212 assumes the hypothesis that the world has no substance in order to prove that this very hypothesis is absurd. 3.24, in turn, assumes the opposite hypothesis, namely that the world has a substance. Thus, 3.24 assumes that the proposition mentioning a complex has a sense which is clarified by the Russellian paraphrase and that the proposition will not be nonsensical, but simply false if the complex does not exist. We may say that 2.0211-2.0212 expresses the consequences of an "abnormal" situation, whereas 3.24 expresses the consequences of a "normal" situation. True, the consequences of these situations clash with each other, but only because they are derived from contradictory hypotheses. Both the Tractarian and the W1 system clearly assume only one of these hypotheses and dismiss the other.

If we keep the above remarks in mind, we may now turn our attention to Wittgenstein's argument contained in 2.0201-2.0212. As already mentioned, 2.0201 states the Wittgensteinian principle of analysis which is cast in a Russellian mould: every proposition about a complex can be dissected into a proposition containing both the constituents of the complex and the complete description of the complex. But we cannot overlook the fact that 2.0201 does not properly belong to the set 2.0201-2.0212. Actually, it is a development of 2.02, which states that

the objects are simple. Thus, 2.0201 states that even propositions containing complexes can be reduced to propositions containing either simple signs designating simple objects or variables for simple signs. Hence, Black's and Fogelin's suggestion of a vicious infinite chain of propositions has its place precisely here: if the analysis of a proposition containing a complex yields another proposition containing another complex, then further analysis is necessary. Of course, if the result of every further analysis were always a proposition containing a complex, we would have to face the following awkward situation: a single proposition containing a complex would be replaceable by an infinite chain of propositions each of which would contain a different complex. However, the analysis of the original proposition must come to an end. And the end will be reached only if either simple signs designating simple objects or variables for simple signs are found.

So far, simple objects are described as the necessary outcome of the analysis of propositions. As to 2.021, it only adds an extra piece of information to the above picture. For it gives the reason why the objects must be simple: they make up the substance of the world. But nothing else is said about the substance itself. Thus, we really do not know why the objects must be simple at this point. We are left with the mere equivalence simple objects/substance, but of course Wittgenstein must be taking this to be enough for the purposes of the argument which follows. And we may say that the role played by 2.021 in 2.0201-2.0212 is merely definitional.

Now 2.0211-2.0212 is the argument to be analyzed. 2.0211 states the hypothesis which has to be disproved. Suppose the world had no substance. This amounts to supposing the world had no simple objects in it. But then what happens to a proposition about a



complex? In other words, how is it possible to guarantee the referential role of the sign for a complex? Two alternatives are open here.

On the one hand, there is the equivalence yielded by the application of the principle of analysis in the Russellian way. A proposition about a complex is equivalent to another proposition about the constituents of the complex and the complete description of the complex. In this case, the non-existence of simple signs would entail that whether a proposition had sense would depend on whether another proposition was true. As already mentioned, an infinite chain of propositions would be required in order to guarantee the referential role of the sign for the complex. This result is bad enough to be excluded.

On the other hand, the principle of analysis might be applied according to the presuppositional alternative. As already mentioned, the adherents of the general concept appeal to the presuppositional relation in order to explain the referential behaviour of a sign for a complex: a proposition containing a complex presupposes an existential proposition affirming the existence and uniqueness of the complex. In doing so, one is able to guarantee the referential role of the sign for a complex without appealing to infinite chains of propositions. But the presuppositional alternative would have to be properly introduced into the W1 system.

The first thing to do would be to define a relation of 'W-presupposition' for sentences containing definite descriptions in subject-position. Suppose two propositions belonging to the TLP-language, say 'P' and 'Q', in W1. 'P' contains a definite description in subject-position. The description is defined by, say, the predicate 'Dx'. 'Q' is an existential proposition of the

form  $(\exists x)(Dx \ \& \ \neg(\exists x)(Ey)(Dx \ \& \ Dy))$ '. In this case, 'P' may be said to W-presuppose 'Q' in W1 when the following conditions are satisfied: i) if both 'P' and its negation '-P' have a sense in W1, then 'Q' is true in W1; ii) if 'Q' is false in W1, both 'P' and '-P' are nonsensical in W1. This is an instance of the relationship expressed by the definition in 2.0211. That Wittgenstein may have considered this alternative by the time the Tractarian system was germinating in his mind is suggested by a passage from the "Notes Dictated to Moore":

"The question whether a proposition has sense (Sinn) can never depend on the truth of another proposition about a constituent of the first. E.g., the question whether  $(x) x=x$  has meaning (Sinn) can't depend on the question whether  $(\exists x) x=x$  is true. It doesn't describe reality at all, and deals therefore solely with symbols; and it says that they must symbolize, but not what they symbolize" (116).

Of course, Wittgenstein's example involves logical propositions and is very special. But two points may be made here: i) the principle that the sense of a proposition cannot depend on the truth of another proposition is formulated in general terms and seems to apply to any kind of proposition; ii) the example itself suggests that the sense of a proposition might depend on the truth of an existential proposition about one of its constituents. In this case, there would be a W-presuppositional relation which would be expressible in Tractarian terminology and which would involve no hypothesis of an infinite chain of propositions. If this is correct, we now have to prove that even this relation is excluded by the W1 system.

In order to do so, let us return to Wittgenstein's argument in 2.0211-2.0212. As already mentioned, 2.0211 simultaneously states the hypothesis that the world has no substance and draws the unpalatable conclusion that, in this case, whether a proposition has

a sense would depend on whether another proposition is true. But this is only enough to prove that the equivalence yielded by the application of the principle of analysis would involve an infinite regress if there are no simple signs. It is not enough to prove that an alternative referential model, given by the W-presuppositional relation, is also to be excluded. This task is done by 2.0212. For the latter draws another undesired conclusion from the original hypothesis by means of the argument form known as 'hypothetical syllogism'. The whole argument may be summed up as follows. We know from 2.0211 that if the world had no substance, then we would have to face the following choice: either there would be an infinite regress of propositions or a W-presuppositional relationship (probably suggested by Wittgenstein's awareness of Frege's hypothesis) would be necessary. The infinite regress is rejected by the application of the principle of analysis. As to the W-presuppositional relation, it is contested by 2.0212. For, according to this aphorism, if the W-presuppositional relation held, we could not sketch any true or false picture of the world. As we do make true or false pictures of the world, the Fregean-like hypothesis must be false.

As a whole, the argument is obscure. At the point the last conclusion is drawn, one only knows, without been given the grounds for it, that if sense depends on truth, then there cannot be any true or false picture of the world. But one thing is certain: if the argument is correct, then sense must be connected with a picture in a way such that the truth or falsity of the picture must be posterior to its having a sense. And this is confirmed later on in the "Tractatus". Actually, in 2.1 we learn that we picture facts to ourselves. And in 2.221-2.222 we learn that a picture presents its sense, and it is the agreement or disagreement of its sense with reality that constitutes the picture's truth or falsity.

In other words, it is the sense of the picture that leads to the truth or falsity of the picture, not the reverse. The sense of a proposition is logically prior to its having a truth-value.

The reductio expounded in 2.0211-2.0212 may still be confirmed by another passage from the "Tractatus", although following a different line of argument. As a matter of fact, the Picture Theory requires that there be a common pictorial form between the picture and what the picture depicts (1922b: 2.15-2.151). It also requires the existence of the pictorial relationship which connects the elements of the picture with the elements of what the picture depicts (1922b: 2.1513-2.1515). Consequently, a proposition about a complex cannot presuppose another proposition stating the existence and uniqueness of the complex. For in that case the pictorial form of the proposition containing the complex and the fact it depicts would not be the same: there would be nothing in the fact which might possibly correspond to the existential proposition presupposed, and the pictorial relationship would collapse. And the whole discussion confirms my claim, namely that, on the basis of the requirements of the Picture Theory, the W1 system opposes a W-presuppositional relation (probably inspired by Frege's concept).

A corollary of my interpretation of the argument is the confirmation of my claim that, contrarily to Fogelin's view, 2.0211-2.0212 does not square ill with 3.24. In fact, 2.0211-2.0212 only makes the hypothesis that the world has no substance and refutes it by reductio ad absurdum, whereas 3.24 assumes that the proposition to be analyzed already has a sense and that the world has a substance.

It is worth stressing that Wittgenstein's

argument in 2.0211-2.0212 remains obscure. The above interpretation reveals that the obscurity does not lie in any inherent unintelligibility on the part of the argument. The problem is, rather, that no justification is given for one of its conclusions, viz. 2.0212. If this is correct, then some secondary conclusions may be drawn. First, both Black and Fogelin are mistaken in thinking that 2.0211-2.0212 only involves a vicious infinite chain of propositions. Second, in contrast with Fogelin's interpretation, mine squares the argument in favour of simple objects with 3.24.

At this point, it is worth asking about another system which would result by eliminating not only the Theory of Descriptions from the "Tractatus", but also the Picture Theory. Let us call such an incomplete system 'W2'. The relation between the W2 system and the general concept of semantic presupposition will be made clear in the next section.

#### V - THE TRACTARIAN SUB-SYSTEM W2 AND THE CONCEPT OF SEMANTIC PRESUPPOSITION

The W2 system is so simplified that it could hardly be compared to the Tractarian system as a whole. Even so, the W2 system would contain some of the basic principles of the "Tractatus". Of course, one of them is the requirement of primitive simple signs for a proposition's making sense. Thus, the W2 system contains the Tractarian claim that the analysis of language has an end which is expressed by the W-language. As already mentioned, the latter is not given, but only postulated. Now the question is whether the W2 system opposes or not the general concept of semantic presupposition as applied to definite descriptions in subject-position.



In order to give an answer to such a question I shall firstly argue that the Tractarian primitive simple signs and the Russellian logically proper names have similar referential mechanisms. True, the two accounts of proper names are different from each other. For we can exhibit at least one instance of logically proper names, like, for example the word 'this', whereas the Wittgensteinian primitive simple signs only correspond to a transcendental postulate of the definiteness of sense and cannot be exhibited a priori. However, Russell was under the influence of Wittgenstein by the time he wrote "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism" (1918: 175). Thus, it is very likely that Russell got the inspiration for his theory of logically proper names from Wittgenstein's theory of primitive simple signs. In fact, there are similarities between the accounts involved. In the "Tractatus", Wittgenstein argues that

"In a proposition a thought can be expressed in such a way that elements of the propositional sign correspond to the objects of the thought.

"I call such elements 'simple signs', and such a proposition 'completely analyzed'." (1922b: 3.2-3.201).

Thus, in a completely analyzed proposition there are correlations of the constituents of the proposition with the constituents of reality. Actually, the constituents function like feelers, connecting the proposition to reality (1922b: 2.1514-2.1515). And the constituents are what may be called Wittgensteinian logically proper names. The simple sign is the representative of an object, and the object is its meaning (1922b: 3.203; 3.22). Hence, it is a primitive sign and cannot be dissected by means of definitions (1922b: 3.16; 3.261). Of course, the meaning of a Wittgensteinian proper name can be explained by means of elucidations. But any elucidation would have to contain the name of which it is an elucidation. Therefore, the elucidation postulates the very meaning it intends to

elucidate (1922b: 3.263). But this circularity is not problematic, because what the name fails to express, its application shows clearly (1922b: 3.262). As one may infer, the Wittgensteinian name has all the features required for relating to its denotation in the way a Russellian logically proper name does. In fact, if 'a' stands for a Wittgensteinian simple sign, then the following is true: i) 'a' has a simple object as its meaning (1922b: 3.203) and thus would be a mere noise if it had no meaning; iii) 'a' has no sense (cfr. 1922b: 3.3); iv) 'a exists' would be nonsensical (cfr. 1922b: 3.221; 3.263). Now this allows drawing the conclusion that Russellian logically proper names and Wittgensteinian primitive simple signs have similar referential mechanisms. Given that Russellian logically proper names are submitted to the Fregean semantic principle, it follows that the Tractarian primitive simple signs are also submitted to the same principle. This makes the primitive simple signs, under the appropriate circumstances, compatible with definite descriptions which generate semantic presuppositions when in subject-position.

Now consider the relationship between the W2 system and the general concept of semantic presupposition for definite descriptions in subject-position. I shall argue that, by itself, Wittgenstein's theory of primitive simple signs is compatible with the general concept of semantic presupposition. In fact, the requirement of simple signs only tells us that any fully analyzed proposition must be reducible to elementary propositions containing primitive simple signs. But the requirement does not tell us *how* this occurs in each particular case. And this leaves open the question of how to analyze a sentence containing a definite description in subject-position. There may be at least two different possibilities here.

First, the definite description may be interpreted as an incomplete symbol which vanishes after analysis. In this case, the sentence containing the description in subject-position would be explained by the Tractarian equivalent of the Russellian paraphrase. Of course, the Tractarian fully analyzed sentence contains the authentic primitive signs and goes further than the Russellian one which does not yet contain the primitive signs and may be said to correspond only to an intermediary stage in the complete analysis. This is Wittgenstein's solution in the "Tractatus", but it does not belong to the W2 system.

Second, the description may be interpreted as an authentic referring expression, but one which refers in an indirect way. In this case, the sentence containing the description in subject-position would be analyzed by appealing to the logical relation of semantic W-presupposition. Let us call the sentence in question 'S' and suppose it contains a definite description which is paraphrased by the predicate 'Dx' in the TLP-language. Accordingly, 'S' semantically W-presupposes an existential sentence of the form ' $(Ex)(Dx \ \& \ \neg(Ex)(Ey)(Dx \ \& \ Dy))$ ', say 'E'. Now the analysis of 'E' might be such that its truth-conditions were given in a fully analyzed existential sentence belonging to the TLP-language and containing only variables for primitive simple signs. Thus, the full analysis of 'S' would run as follows: 'S' semantically W-presupposes 'E' which in turn is dissected into a set of elementary propositions containing only variables for primitive simple signs. If this is possible, then the full analysis of 'S' would also lead to the primitive simple signs, although in a different way from the Tractarian paraphrase. In other words, although semantically W-presupposing in the sense of the general concept, 'S' would still be reducible to the primitive simple signs of the postulated Wittgensteinian logically perfect language.

Of course, this is *not* Wittgenstein's solution to the problem in the "Tractatus", but it may be thought of as an adequate solution in the W2 system. As a result, the theory of primitive simple signs by itself is not enough in the "Tractatus" for rejecting the application of a presuppositional analysis to definite descriptions in subject-position. As a matter of fact, the theory must be supplemented by another aspect of the Tractarian system, such as the Picture Theory, in order to become incompatible with the general concept of semantic presupposition for definite descriptions in subject-position.

The above result is not surprising, for the Fregean account of proper names allows the conjunction of the concept of semantic presupposition (for compound proper names, that is, definite descriptions) and the semantic principle (for simple proper names). Now the Tractarian primitive simple signs are submitted to the Fregean principle. In addition, it has already been shown that Russell's logically proper names are also compatible with the general concept of semantic presupposition<sup>6</sup>.

#### V - FINAL REMARKS

I expect it is now clearly established that the early Wittgenstein's solution to the problem of semantic presupposition of definite descriptions in subject-position is as follows.

First, the "Tractatus" adopts the Russellian Theory of Descriptions, but introduces the following modifications: i) the primitive signs in "Principia" are not the genuine ones required for the definiteness of sense of our propositions; ii) unlike Russell's use of

one-place predicates, the "Tractatus" seems to emphasise the use of <sup>1</sup>n-place predicates; iii) the sign for identity is excluded from the Tractarian system; iv) the Tractarian account of generality involves not only truth-operations, but also logical prototypes; iv) the axiomatic method in "Principia" is replaced by the method of truth-tables in the "Tractatus". Even so, the resulting system is logically equivalent to the predicate calculus with bound variables in the formal system of "Principia Mathematica".

Second, it is not only the Theory of Descriptions that opposes the general concept of semantic presupposition in the Tractarian system. In fact, the Picture Theory also opposes the concept in question. According to the Picture Theory, the relation of semantic W-presupposition is incompatible with the Tractarian system.

Third, the Tractarian primitive simple signs do not oppose the general concept of semantic presupposition. This is so because, as in the case of Russellian logically proper names, the Tractarian system adopts for the primitive simple signs a referential mechanism in which the Fregean semantic principle still plays the main role. Now the Fregean simple proper names are submitted to the same semantic principle and are compatible with the concept of semantic presupposition (Frege's account is not inconsistent from this standpoint). Thus, the Wittgensteinian primitive simple signs are also compatible with the general concept of semantic presupposition.

The Tractarian solution, as long as it is logically equivalent to the predicate calculus with bound variables of "Principia Mathematica", is disappointing. But the analysis of the parts of the Tractarian system which oppose the general concept of semantic presupposition throws a new light both in the logical



relationships involved and the architecture of the "Tractatus". The relation of semantic presupposition can be introduced only if the Tractarian system is reduced to the minimal W2 system in which only the requirement of primitive simple signs is present. This fact shows how articulate and how consistent are the various parts of the Tractarian system.

### NOTES

1. Here, I am taking the word 'statement' as synonymous with 'proposition'.

2. A similar interpretation, although lacking any justification, may be found in Black (1964: 61).

3. As to an expression like ' $(x) (x = x)$ ', it contains what has to be eliminated by means of Hintikka's transformation rules. The problem is solved by recalling that, in Russell's system, any well-formed formula, say 'A', is equivalent to the conjunction 'A & T', where 'T' may stand for a tautology in which the identity-sign is absent. Thus, ' $(x)(x = x)$ ' may be replaced by its equivalent ' $(x)((x = x) \& T)$ '. In turn, the latter may be replaced by its Tractarian equivalent, namely '(UEx)T'. As a result, all the usual tautologies involving the identity-sign would be replaced by tautologies in which this sign would be absent. Although this procedure does not involve any logical error, it looks rather clumsy.

Hintikka's rules may be supplemented by the Wittgensteinian rules for dealing with expressions involving constants. Thus, ' $F(a,a)$ ' (Tractarian and Russellian expression) may be rendered as ' $F(a,b) \& a=b$ ' (Russellian expression only); ' $F(a,b)$ ' (Tractarian and Russellian) may be rendered as ' $F(a,b) \& a \neq b$ ' (Russellian only). See Wittgenstein 1922b: 5.531.

4. For example, a proof that (10) entails (11) would run:

1.  $(Ex)(Fx \& Bx \& \neg(Ex)(Ey)(x \neq y \& (Fx \& Fy)))$   
[premise]
2.  $Fa \& Ba \& \neg(Ex)(Ey)(x \neq y \& (Fx \& Fy))$  [1, EI]

- |   |                 |
|---|-----------------|
| 3. Fa   | [2, Simp]       |
| 4. Ba   | [2, Simp]       |
| 5. $\neg(\text{Ex})(\text{Ey})(x \neq y \ \& \ (Fx \ \& \ Fy))$                 | [2, Simp]       |
| 6. $(x)(y)\neg(x \neq y \ \& \ (Fx \ \& \ Fy))$                                 | [5, Equiv]      |
| 7. $(x)(y)(Fx \Rightarrow (Fy \Rightarrow y=x))$                                | [6, Equiv]      |
| 8. $Fx \Rightarrow (Fy \Rightarrow y=x)$  | [7, UI]         |
| 9. $Fa \Rightarrow (Fy \Rightarrow y=a)$  | [8, EI]         |
| 10. $Fy \Rightarrow y=a$  | [3, 9, MP]      |
| 11. $(y)(Fy \Rightarrow y=a)$   | [10, UG]        |
| 12. $Fa \ \& \ Ba \ \& \ (y)(Fy \Rightarrow y=a)$                               | [3, 4, 11 Conj] |
| 13. $(\text{Ex})(Fx \ \& \ Bx \ \& \ (y)(Fy \Rightarrow y=a))$                  | [12, EG]        |
| 14. $(10) \Rightarrow (\text{Ex})(Fx \ \& \ Bx \ \& \ (y)(Fy \Rightarrow y=a))$ | [1-13, CP]      |

Here, 'EI' and 'EG' stand for 'existential instantiation' and 'existential generalization' respectively; 'UI' and 'UG' for 'universal instantiation' and 'universal generalization' respectively; 'Simp', 'Equiv', 'MP', 'Conj', and CP stand for 'simplification', 'logical equivalence', 'modus ponens', 'conjunction', and 'conditional proof' respectively. That the converse implication also holds may be proved along the line of a reductio ad absurdum.

5. Of course, there is also the alternative of constructing another system, say W3, by eliminating both the Theory of Descriptions and the principle of bivalence from the "Tractatus". This would involve the acceptance of truth-valueless statements within the new system and obviously reinforce the possibility of appealing to a relation of semantic presupposition in order to explain the referential role of definite descriptions in subject-position. But this case would be less interesting than the ones I am considering here.

6. See chapter 2, section IV.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE "PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS" AND SEMANTIC PRESUPPOSITIONS GENERATED BY DEFINITE DESCRIPTIONS IN SUBJECT-POSITION

#### I - PRELIMINARY REMARKS

In the analysis of the Tractarian solution to the problem of semantic presuppositions of definite descriptions in subject-position, our research question was formulated in a way such that it might obtain an adequate answer from the Wittgensteinian view. But the "Investigations" drastically alters the conceptual framework of the "Tractatus". This raises the problem of checking whether our research question is still adequate as regards the new Wittgensteinian approach. Another problem is raised by the fact that the later Wittgenstein does not offer any clear hint about the semantic features involved in our question. Thus, in order to get as close as possible to the later Wittgenstein's account of the referring role of definite descriptions in subject-position, I shall do as follows in the current chapter. First, I shall discuss the question as formulated in chapter 1 in connexion with the conceptual framework of the "Investigations". Second, I shall formulate an alternative specific pragmatic question about the referring use of definite descriptions in subject-position concerning the particular language-game of reporting an event and argue that the answer to such a question will be the closest I can get to an adequate answer to the problem of semantic presuppositions generated by definite descriptions in subject-position as formulated in chapter

1. Third, although drawing inspiration from the development of the Russell/Strawson controversy and mainly from Donnellan's "Reference and Definite Descriptions" (1966) and Kripke's "Speaker's Reference and Semantic Reference" (1979), I shall restrict the discussion to the language-game of reporting an event and consider all the possible cases concerning the referring use of definite descriptions in this particular language-game. This will lead to a distinction between the coincidental and the non-coincidental referring use of definite descriptions in the language-game considered. Fourth, I shall attempt to make explicit what may be called an account, in the spirit of the "Investigations", of the coincidental referring use of definite descriptions in the language-game of reporting an event. Fifth, I shall also attempt to make explicit what may be called an account, in the spirit of the "Investigations", of the non-coincidental referring use of definite descriptions in the language-game of reporting an event. Sixth and finally, I shall analyze further the referential mechanism involved and shall try to extract the lessons we may learn from the whole analysis of the language-game of reporting an event with respect to the problem of semantic presuppositions generated by definite descriptions in subject-position. I shall argue that not only the account made explicit is very likely the later Wittgenstein's account of the referential role of definite descriptions in the particular language-game of reporting an event, but also that the account only allows a very restricted generalization for certain analogous language-games. In addition, the later Wittgenstein's view of language allows some language-games in which certain relationships that are analogous to the one of semantic presupposition would hold for some expressions.

II - THE QUESTION ABOUT SEMANTIC PRESUPPOSITIONS  
GENERATED BY DEFINITE DESCRIPTIONS  
IN SUBJECT-POSITION AND THE NEW  
PHILOSOPHICAL FRAMEWORK IN THE "INVESTIGATIONS"

It is a well-known fact that the "Investigations" tries to explain the meaning of our words in a radically new way. The later Wittgenstein's basic view is that the meaning of a word is its use in language (1953 I: 30; 43; 120; 138; 197; 247; 454; 532; 556-7; 561; II: 147; 175-6; 190; 220). But the principle is to be taken as chiefly *programmatically*. And Wittgenstein's program seems to be an attempt to replace the traditional essentialist question 'what is ( )' by the alternative one 'how is the word ( ) used?', where the blanks are to be filled by the usual philosophical concepts, such as 'truth', 'substance', 'beauty' and so on. Of course, if the attempt is successful, the philosophical search for the 'essence' would be nothing but the search for a phantom. The philosophical puzzles would have been created by deviating our words from their ordinary use. And the correct method in philosophy would be to bring the philosophical words back to their ordinary use.

But this raises a twofold difficulty in the task of finding out the later Wittgenstein's answer to the problem of semantic presuppositions generated by definite descriptions in subject-position.

On the one hand, the question we are pursuing has been formulated in semantic terms in Chapter 1. The question fitted the analysis of the Tractarian system because the early Wittgenstein's main concern was to make explicit the transcendental semantics which underlies any descriptive language. But the later Wittgenstein's main



concern is the *use* of our words, and this points towards pragmatic considerations. Thus, we must check whether or not the question we are pursuing can be formulated, or has an equivalent pragmatic alternative, within the new philosophical framework of the "Investigations". A negative result might mean that the "Investigations" alters so radically the philosophical framework of the "Tractatus" that the question I am pursuing here turns out to be empty. But suppose it is possible to formulate, within the framework of the "Investigations", a question which is analogous to the one I am pursuing. It seems clear that the application of the later Wittgenstein's programmatic principle yields the fact that a semantic feature (meaning) is explained by a pragmatic one (use). Thus, as far as the problem of semantic presuppositions of statements containing definite descriptions in subject-position is concerned, it also seems clear that the same mechanism, that is, a semantic feature (presupposition -- if any) is to be explained by a pragmatic one (use). But this procedure would take us to the borderline between semantics and pragmatics, and the risk of blurring concepts in this unstable domain is great.

On the other hand, although the above procedure of explaining a semantic feature by a pragmatic one would be in the spirit of the "Investigations", the fact is that the later Wittgenstein does not deal explicitly with such a problem. Therefore, if there is any Wittgensteinian account of the semantic presuppositions of statements containing definite descriptions in subject-position in the philosophy expounded by the "Investigations", the account has to be inferred from the text. But this means the danger of either misinterpreting or extrapolating the later philosophy. Thus, we shall have to be extremely careful in order to avoid any of these dangers.

Keeping the above considerations in mind,

consider our question as formulated in chapter 1: 'does the assertion made by means of a definite description in the subject-position of a declarative sentence yield a statement which semantically presupposes the existence and uniqueness of the object to which the description refers?'. If we follow the spirit of the "Investigations", it seems we should not ask this. The above question should be replaced by one concerning the uses of the words involved. For example, we should ask about the uses of the expressions 'assertion', 'definite description', 'declarative sentence', 'statement', 'semantically presupposes', 'existence', 'uniqueness', 'object', and 'refers'. In doing so, we should obtain a perspicuous view of the functioning of language in the domain considered and would be able to solve -- or dissolve -- the problem. Let us check the validity of such a procedure as regards our question by examining some of these cases.

For example, consider the use of the expression 'definite description'. Although Wittgenstein does not deal explicitly with this problem, I think it is possible to undertake the task in the spirit of his later philosophy. In the first place, it is worth noticing that a 'definite description' is a kind of 'description', and Wittgenstein thinks the latter word has multifarious uses:

"What we call 'descriptions' are instruments for particular uses. Think of a machine drawing, a cross-section, an elevation with measurements, which an engineer has before him. Thinking of a description as a word-picture of the facts has something misleading about it: one tends to think only of such pictures as hang on our wall: which seem simply to portray how a thing looks, what it is like. (These pictures are as it were idle.)" (1953 I: 291).

As a result, one may conclude that the word 'description' expresses a family resemblance concept in the "Investigations". As such, the word in fact has many uses, but this does not mean that the various things we call

descriptions have a basic feature which is shared by them all. There is not an "essence" of description, let alone in the Tractarian sense of the 'essence of the world'.

As to definite descriptions, they constitute a sub-domain of the things we usually call 'descriptions' in ordinary language. They have no privileged status at all. But they also have multifarious uses. For example, we may have definite descriptions of: i) real persons (e.g. 'the president of the United States'); ii) physical facts (e.g. 'the Doppler effect'); iii) historical facts (e.g. 'the Second World War'); iv) physical objects (e.g. 'the table'); v) animals (e.g. 'the tiger'); vi) kinds of stuff (e.g. 'the water'); vii) fictitious persons (e.g. 'the King of France'); viii) fictitious facts (e.g. 'the death of the King of France'); ix) psychological states (e.g. 'the pain John had yesterday'); x) historical characters (e.g. 'the pupil of Plato'); xi) idealised persons (e.g. 'the Prime Minister Britain needs'); and so on. Of course, these descriptions may be used in different language-games with quite different purposes. As a result, the criteria for using such a diversified set of expressions must also be diversified. This fact suggests that, in Wittgenstein's later philosophy, definite descriptions in subject-position may be used in many different ways and are not necessarily connected with yielding statements that have semantic presuppositions. In reality, the later Wittgenstein seems to point towards a family resemblance view of definite descriptions.

Now consider, as another example, the analysis of the use of the word 'presupposition' in the later philosophy. Although the word in question occurs many times in the later Wittgenstein<sup>1</sup>, he does not make an extensive analysis of its use. As a matter of fact, there is only one passage in the "Investigations" in which he discusses the use of the word 'presupposition' :

"Should we ever really express ourselves like this: "Naturally I am presupposing that....."? -- Or do we not do so only because the other person already knows that?

Doesn't a presupposition *imply a doubt*? And doubt may be entirely lacking. Doubting has an end." (1953 II: 180; italics mine).

This is almost everything the "Investigations" says about the use of the word 'presupposition' and its cognates in ordinary language. But the above passage clearly indicates that the word has a use basically as a means to suggest, or imply, that the speaker has made an unjustified assumption. The suggestion introduces some doubt about the speaker's discourse and serves as a means of rejecting the grounds for his argumentation. But of course the assumption may be understood either as a supposition, e.g. a premise involved by the argument, or as a prerequisite of the premise or the argument itself. In each case the logical relationship is different, and the word 'presupposition' may only be used by analogy.

If this is true, then Wittgenstein's later philosophy may be taken as suggesting a family resemblance view of presupposition<sup>2</sup>. I would suggest that this happens in the following way. The word and its cognates may at first be applied to a certain set of cases of a determinate kind. But as we notice analogies between these cases and others, we also apply the word to the new cases, thus "extending" the concept. If the "extension" is repeated a certain number of times, we obtain a complex network of similarities which overlap and criss-cross. This would characterize a family resemblance concept. Therefore, there would obviously be no point in searching for a common characteristic belonging to all cases of presupposition.

According to Cooper, the family resemblance view gives an adequate picture of the ordinary use of the word

and its cognates (1974: 25). But the view in question also suggests that we should greatly mistrust the technical use of the word. As a matter of fact, Cooper claims that the view forbids treating presupposition as a useful theoretical concept to be employed within a theory of language (id.). I would agree with this, for the technical use postulates the existence of a mythological "common characteristic" which is to be shared by all, or at least most, cases of presupposition.

What is more, if the task of the Wittgensteinian philosophy is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their ordinary use (1953 I: 116), then the technical use of 'presupposition' and its cognates, the use that leads to philosophical problems, is clearly a misleading deviation from ordinary language. Bringing 'presupposes' and its cognates back to their ordinary use frees the fly from the fly-bottle in this particular case.

As a result, we may say that the later Wittgenstein would reject the relation of semantic presupposition as a general explanation of the referential mechanism involved by definite descriptions in subject-position. But the questions about the uses of expressions like 'definite description' and 'presupposition', although they lead to the above family resemblance views, they do not yield a complete answer to the problem I am pursuing. In fact, the obtaining of a network of inter-related uses is only a generic answer to my question. It is true that the family resemblance view concerns all the possible uses of the expressions 'definite description' and 'presupposition' as well as the possible connexions between such uses. But one may ask whether the later Wittgenstein would admit that there is at least one specific use of definite descriptions in subject-position that would generate semantic presuppositions. In other words, the network of overlapping and criss-crossing



similarities that characterizes the family resemblance concept 'presupposition' might be such that it would allow the existence of at least one case involving semantic presuppositions. Although in a very limited number, there are language-games in ordinary language in which we do use assertorically definite descriptions in subject-position in order to refer to things in the world. Thus, one may specifically ask whether there is a particular language-game involving both the referring use of definite descriptions in the subject-position of declarative sentences and the relation of semantic presupposition as expressed by the general concept. True, giving an answer to such a specific question would require an analysis which would be restricted to a particular language-game. Besides, the application of the results of the restricted analysis would be very limited. Even so, this would be the only way to obtain something which is closer to a complete answer to the problem I am pursuing.

The analysis of a particular language-game coheres with Wittgenstein's basic motivation in the "Investigations": to concentrate on particular cases in order to avoid the philosophical phantom of the "common characteristic". Besides, the unveiling of the existence of semantic presuppositions in the particular case of a language-game involving statements containing definite descriptions in subject-position might be consistent with the above mentioned family resemblance view of presupposition. Thus, although the later Wittgenstein would not make the broader claim that in every language-game involving definite descriptions in subject-position there are semantic presuppositions, he might allow the narrower claim that there is at least one language-game in which definite descriptions are assertorically used in the subject-position of declarative sentences and yield statements which have semantic presuppositions. The semantic presuppositions of statements containing definite

descriptions in subject-position might constitute one of the contributing features within the network of criss-crossing and overlapping similarities belonging to the family resemblance account of presupposition in our language.

As a result, our concern is not void within the framework of the later philosophy. Rather, it has to be given a precise location inside that framework. This may be done in the following way. It is a well known fact that the "Investigations" analyzes the multifarious language-games as domains of language which are somehow independent of each other. Among them, we might find a very limited number which would involve definite descriptions in subject-position in a way such that the referential role of the descriptions may be essential for successfully playing these games. There are no criteria to find all these language-games in the broader domain of our language, and the analysis of only one of them does not allow the application of the results to the others. But the consideration of a particular language-game might provide some hints which would allow at least a reasonable conjecture concerning the later Wittgenstein's main tendency in the analysis of some kinds of referring use of descriptions.

Of course, we would hardly find in the "Investigations" an analysis of a language-game in which the referring use is the issue. The later Wittgenstein's concern was rather to dissolve some of the philosophical puzzles involving the so-called referential function. But this does not mean that the consideration of the referential role of definite descriptions in a specific language-game would be unimportant in all possible cases. As a matter of fact, in some cases the consideration might throw some light in the mechanisms involved by the specific language-game. What is more, the later

Wittgenstein himself imagined some language-games in which referring is the most important part. Consider for example both the primitive language between a builder A and his assistant B and the later expansion of such a language (Wittgenstein 1953: 2; 15). A asks for a specific building-stone and B brings it. Of course, the words 'block', 'pillar', 'slab' and 'beam' in this primitive language have a referring use. True, the status of a call like 'block!' in this primitive language is very difficult to determine: is it a mere word or a complete sentence? (Wittgenstein 1953: 19). Even so, each sentence/word refers to a specific type of building-stone and the successful reference by means of the word is a condition of possibility for playing the language-game. In addition, an interesting case of referential failure in the expanded language (15) is analyzed (Wittgenstein 1953: 41). True, (2) was imagined by Wittgenstein in order to illustrate how simplistic can be the Augustinian model of language by exaggerating the importance of the so-called referential function of the words. But this does not mean that the limited consideration of particular referring mechanisms in some language-games is to be definitely excluded from our investigations. There remains the fact that the consideration of the referring use of definite descriptions in subject-position may be an essential prerequisite in the analysis of a certain language-game.

The above considerations also reveal that the application of the Wittgensteinian programmatic principle, although it belongs to a pragmatic framework, may sometimes include questions which are closely related to problems in the domain of semantics. As already mentioned, Wittgenstein's purpose in constructing (2) was to illustrate the fact that referring, although it is an essential part in certain language-games, is not adequate for explaining the functioning of all our language. But his very line of argumentation allows us to infer that

referring may be an essential part of some language-games.

Consequently, in order to obtain something closer to a complete answer to the question I am pursuing, the general question about the use of our words has to be replaced by another, more specific, question concerning the referring use of definite descriptions in subject-position in a certain language-game.

The main conclusion from the above considerations is that the question about semantic presuppositions of definite-descriptions in subject-position as formulated in chapter 1 is misplaced in the "Investigations" conceptual framework. Even so, Wittgenstein's later philosophy is consistent with, and sometimes may even require, the consideration of the referring use in a particular language-game. Now if the language-game is such that it involves the referring use of definite descriptions in subject-position, then the analysis of the language-game will provide the necessary information for deciding whether or not the statements yielded semantically presuppose the existence and uniqueness of the objects to which the descriptions refer. Although the result of the analysis will be limited, it may give us some hints concerning the later Wittgenstein's tendency in the analysis of some language-games involving the referring use of definite descriptions in subject-position. Thus, although appealing to a different question, the analysis of the referring use in a specific language-game shares some common characteristics with the semantic analysis which we are developing so far. We may now pass on to the next section, in which I shall try to formulate and analyze a pragmatic question such that it is: i) closely related to the semantic question I am pursuing in my work; ii) consistent with the framework of the philosophy expounded in the "Investigations".



III - FORMULATION AND ANALYSIS OF A PRAGMATIC  
QUESTION IN THE SPIRIT OF THE "INVESTIGATIONS"  
AND CLOSELY RELATED TO OUR SEMANTIC PROBLEM

It is a well-known fact that Strawson succeeds in obtaining a concept of semantic presupposition by means of a pragmatic question concerning the 'referring use'. So, our problem is now to find a way of formulating, in the later Wittgensteinian framework, a specific pragmatic question concerning a particular language-game in a way such that the question is related to the problem of semantic presuppositions of statements containing definite descriptions in subject-position. In doing so, we will be able to check whether or not the "Investigations" involves any account of a particular language-game which would yield results that are similar to Strawson's, although in a very limited domain. The problem will be solved in two stages. First, I shall try to formulate adequately, and in the spirit of the "Investigations", a specific pragmatic question to which the answer will give us the possible semantic features concerning a determinate referring use of definite descriptions in subject-position in a particular language-game. Second, I shall check whether or not the pragmatic question thus formulated is consistent with the philosophy expounded in the "Investigations".

Let us start with the problem of formulating adequately a specific question in the spirit of the "Investigations". In order to do this, select the language-game of *reporting an event* from the list in paragraph 23 of the "Investigations". The language-game is complex and may be played in many different ways. For example, one may: i) truly and objectively report an event with the unique purpose of conveying adequate information; ii) ironically report an event with the purpose of



criticizing something; iii) comically report a distorted event with the purpose of making someone laugh; and so on. Although all the above cases correspond to adequate ways of playing the language-game, our analysis will be restricted to case 'i', for the latter involves a certain regularity in the referring use of definite descriptions that may be connected with semantic presuppositions. From now on, I shall use the expression 'language-game of reporting an event' as an abbreviation of the way we play the language-game in case 'i'. Thus, the language-game of reporting an event will be restricted to the language-game that is played by at least two persons such that: i) one of them, call him or her the reporter, knows that something has happened and sincerely intends to tell to the other how it truly happened; ii) the other person, call him or her the hearer, knows that the reporter has a certain information concerning what happened and sincerely intends to extract the adequate information from the reporter. The initial move of the language-game may be made by means of a question like 'do you know what happened?'. The question may be asked either by the reporter or by the hearer. The next move is usually the reporting of the event. Now an event may sometimes be described as 'the so-and-so' or may involve someone or something that may be described by a description of the form 'the so-and-so'. Thus, playing this particular language-game may involve the use of declarative sentences containing definite descriptions in subject-position with the purpose of conveying information about the objects referred to by the descriptions. As a result, whenever the above sentences are involved, the language-game of reporting an event essentially depends on the referential role of definite descriptions in order to be played adequately.

Now suppose the general question about the use of the expression 'definite description' we have analyzed

in the spirit of the "Investigations" is replaced by the following more specific one: 'how do we use assertorically definite descriptions in the subject-position of declarative sentences in the language-game of reporting an event?'. Of course, the two questions are not equivalent. For the former is concerned with all the possible ways we may use the expression 'definite description' in all kinds of sentences in ordinary English, whereas the latter is specifically concerned with the way definite descriptions refer when used assertorically in subject-position of declarative sentences in the language-game of reporting an event. The latter question is more specific than the former and leads us directly to our main subject. As already mentioned, if we appeal to the former question concerning the general use of the expression 'definite description' in our language, we would not obtain a complete answer to our problem.

But the above question is still too general. It may be improved in order to become more specific. For example, we may ask: 'in the language-game of reporting an event, do we use assertorically definite descriptions in the subject-position of declarative sentences in order to refer to objects in the world in a way such that we may say that the statements yielded semantically presuppose the existence and uniqueness of the objects referred to by the descriptions?' Here, the broader question concerning the referring use of definite descriptions is replaced by the narrower question concerning semantic presuppositions yielded by the referring use of definite descriptions in the language-game of reporting an event.

But we can make the question still closer to the spirit of the "Investigations". Given that both in ordinary English and the language-game of reporting an event the logical relation of semantic presupposition with which we are concerned involves specific uses of the words

'statement', 'true' and 'false', we may now ask: 'in the language-game of reporting an event, do we use the words 'statement', 'true' and 'false' in a way such that a statement containing a definite description in subject-position semantically presupposes another statement about the existence and uniqueness of the object referred to by the description?' Here, we nearly have a Wittgensteinian question about specific uses of words in the language-game concerned. Now if we take into consideration the fact that in the problem we are considering in this work the use of definite descriptions in subject-position is connected to, and is interchangeable with, a specific use of the words 'statement', 'true' and 'false', the above question may become more specifically Wittgensteinian. As a matter of fact, in order to avoid the technical term 'semantic presupposition' in our question, we may define such a relationship by means of the words 'true' and 'false', thus obtaining an authentic question in the spirit of the "Investigations".

Initially, let us define a specific use of the above words which is involved by my semantic concern as defined in chapter 1. Suppose 'P' stands for a declarative sentence in the language-game of reporting an event. Roughly, I believe we may say we use the word 'statement' in the language-game in a way such that whenever we assertorically use 'P' in order to convey information we obtain a statement<sup>3</sup>; we use the words 'true' and 'statement' in a way such that the statement that P is the case is true if and only if P is in fact the case; and we use the words 'false' and 'statement' in the language-game in a way such that the statement that P is the case is false if and only if P is not the case<sup>4</sup>. There are many other uses of the words 'statement', 'true' and 'false' in ordinary English, but I am only concerned with this particular one, because the others may be excluded from the language-game of reporting an event as described

earlier.

We may now advance the more specific pragmatic question concerning the use of the words 'statement', 'true' and 'false' in connexion with a possible logical relation of semantic presupposition in the language-game. The question may be formulated as follows: do we use the words 'the', 'statement', 'true' and 'false' in the language-game of reporting an event in a way such that the assertoric use of a declarative sentence containing a definite description in subject-position yields: i) a true or false statement depending on the adequacy of the predicate to the object referred to by the description only if another statement about the existence and uniqueness of the object described is true; ii) an utterance which is discarded as an incorrect move only if the statement about the existence and uniqueness of the object referred to by the description is false? This is the specific pragmatic question of which the answer involves the consideration of aspects that are closely related to semantic ones. It is worth noticing that a positive answer to the above question would involve a relation of semantic presupposition which would be an instance of the general concept. As a matter of fact, the features belonging to part 'i' of the above definition comply with the corresponding features of the general concept; as for the feature belonging to part 'ii' of the definition, we may say that if the utterance is discarded as an incorrect move, then it is truth-valueless and thus also complies with the corresponding feature of the general concept. Since the relation expressed by the above definition is related to the language-game of reporting an event, call it the relation of semantic E-presupposition. In this particular case, the utterance which is discarded as an incorrect move has a sense even though its semantic E-presupposition is false. What is more, the sense of the semantically E-presupposing sentence does not include the

sense of the semantically E-presupposed sentence.

Let us pass to the second stage in the solution of our problem of formulating, in the terms of Wittgenstein's later philosophy, an adequate pragmatic question in order to get an answer to our semantic enquiry. I shall now check whether or not the specific pragmatic question above formulated is consistent with the philosophy expounded in the "Investigations". So far, it has been shown that the analysis of the words 'true', 'false' and 'statement' concerning the referring use of definite descriptions in the language-game of reporting an event provides an answer, although restricted, to our question as formulated in chapter 1.

Now I believe that, as far as Wittgenstein's later philosophy is concerned, the specific pragmatic question here formulated is consistent with the "Investigations". For we are considering a particular language-game in which we do use assertorically definite descriptions in subject-position in order to refer to things in the world; the adequate referring use of descriptions is a prerequisite for being successful in the language-game. In fact, the analysis of this particular case of referring use of definite descriptions in subject-position is required in order to reach a perspicuous view of the language-game of reporting an event. What is more, in the spirit of the "Investigations", the analysis of this particular language-game will only yield a restricted answer to our semantic problem. The phantom of the "common characteristic" will be avoided. Even so, our analysis lies at the point where the semantic considerations belonging to the traditional philosophy get in touch with the pragmatic considerations proposed by the new conceptual framework of Wittgenstein's later philosophy.

Now consider the framework involved by the



specific pragmatic question. Although the question is formulated in a more restricted way, it is connected with Strawson's general analysis of the 'referring use' of definite descriptions in his famous 1950 paper "On Referring" and the controversy that followed. The Strawsonian expression is worth noticing. On the one hand, it is the analysis of the *referring* use, and this stresses the Strawsonian concern with a semantic feature, that is, the referential role of definite descriptions. On the other hand, it is the analysis of the referring use, and this stresses the Strawsonian concern with a pragmatic feature, that is, the way we use definite descriptions in ordinary language. As a result, we may say that the Strawsonian question about the referring use requires a kind of answer that will explain a semantic feature by means of a pragmatic one. This is completely different from the Fregean purely semantic question, in which a semantic feature is explained by another semantic one. Thus, the Fregean question has not an adequate place in the current analysis.

By contrast, Strawson's concern is somehow closer to my concern as formulated in the spirit of the "Investigations". True, Strawson's account might be accused of being far too general by the philosophy of the "Investigations". Even so, Strawson claims that we do use assertorically definite descriptions in the subject-position of declarative sentences in order to refer to objects in the world in a way such that we may say the statements yielded semantically presuppose the existence and uniqueness of the objects referred to by the descriptions. Thus, if conveniently restricted to the language-game of reporting an event, Strawson's general account of the referring use of definite descriptions in subject-position would provide an adequate answer to our specific pragmatic question involving this particular language-game. But whether or not the later Wittgenstein

would agree with Strawson's answer in this particular case remains to be seen.

The comparison with Strawson's account may be taken further. In fact, the detailed formulation of our question concerning the language-game of reporting an event involves a specific referring use of expressions of a certain kind, that is, definite descriptions, which is closely related to another specific use of the words 'statement', 'true' and 'false'. Now Strawson's account originates from an analogous, although more general, concern. Therefore, both our specific pragmatic question and Strawson's general question about the referring use seem to have something in common.

As a result, the framework originated by the Strawsonian question is connected with the framework originated by our pragmatic question. Thus, the consideration of the general framework originated by Strawson's question will be useful for finding the particular framework with which we are interested. In addition, it seems clear that Strawson's question and its corresponding framework apply to the language-game of reporting an event.

We already know that the Strawsonian general question about the referring use is situated at the borderline which separates the domain of semantics from the one of pragmatics. As a matter of fact, Strawson seems to be <sup>undecided</sup> indeterminate as between a semantic characterisation of presupposition and a pragmatic one in "On Referring" (see Kempson 1975: 49-50). It is no wonder that Sellars' paper "Mr. Strawson On Referring" (1954) takes Strawson's account as being pragmatic. Thus, the Strawsonian analysis in "On Referring" was somehow incomplete, and this is illustrated by the qualifications he was forced to make in his original account in order to reply to Sellars (see

Strawson 1954: 225-7). The evolution of the controversy inaugurated by Strawson leads us directly to Donnellan's analysis of the referential use of definite descriptions in subject-position in his famous paper "Reference and Definite Descriptions" (1966). Here, Donnellan seems to make an exhaustive analysis of all the alternatives involved in the referring use of definite descriptions in subject-position. But Donnellan's framework was later complemented by some important qualifications made by Kripke. This means that the analysis of all the possible alternatives concerning the referring use of definite descriptions seems to involve the appeal to the Kripkean notions of *semantic referent* and *speaker's referent* (Kripke 1979: 13-4).

According to Kripke, the semantic referent is given by the speaker's *general intention* to refer to a certain object, whereas the speaker's referent is given by the speaker's *specific intention* to refer to a certain object (Kripke 1979: 14-5). Kripke claims that these notions are general and applicable to all languages (1979: 21).

In addition, although Donnellan distinguishes between the attributive and the referential use of definite descriptions, Kripke argues that the former is rather a referential use in which the semantic referent of the expression and the speaker's referent are the same. Kripke calls this the *simple case* (1979: 15). As to Donnellan's referential use, it corresponds to Kripke's *complex case* in which the semantic referent may coincide or not with the speaker's referent (id.). In this respect, the appeal to the Kripkean notions seems to be the best we can get in the analysis of the referential mechanisms of definite descriptions so far.

Although the later Wittgenstein would hardly

make so many universal claims as Kripke does, it seems reasonable to assume that he might make a good use of the Kripkean notions in the restricted analysis of the referential mechanism of definite descriptions in the language-game of reporting an event. The reasons in favour of assuming the Kripkean notions in our restricted analysis are as follows. First, at least as far as the restricted version of the language-game of reporting an event is concerned, Wittgenstein's interest in the referential mechanisms involved by definite descriptions would be analogous to Kripke's. Second, the language-game of reporting an event is such that the reporter may mistakenly use a definite description. Now this is a situation in which the distinction between the semantic referent of a definite description and the reporter's referent is important. Third, there seems to be nothing in the philosophy expounded by the "Investigations" that would oppose the appeal to the Kripkean notions in the analysis of the way definite descriptions refer in the restricted version of the language-game of reporting an event. Thus, the appeal to the Kripkean notions seems not only to cohere with our specific pragmatic question but also to provide a useful framework for the restricted analysis. But it is worth noticing that, although the notions are useful tools for understanding some of the referential mechanisms involved, neither the reporter nor the hearer have these notions before their minds when they are effectively playing the language-game. What is more, the Kripkean notions do not apply properly to other versions of the language-game of reporting an event, such as, for example, the ones expressed by the above cases 'ii' and 'iii'. The application of these notions is very limited and they would not allow making generalizations without more ado.

If the appeal to the Kripkean notions is correct, then we have obtained an important criterion for

evaluating the answers to the above question. Although the question is formulated in pragmatic terms, a favourable answer concerning the logical relation of semantic presupposition in the language-game of reporting an event will have to depend solely on considerations about the semantic referents of the expressions involved. In other words, the answer has to be decided by means of considerations involving exclusively the semantic referents of the definite descriptions in subject-position. The speaker's referents cannot affect the explanation of the referential mechanism of the descriptions. For if pragmatic considerations are involved, the presuppositional relation -- if any -- cannot be characterized as purely 'semantic'. And we shall not be facing a semantic concept, but something different.

Now consider the general framework of Strawson's question as made explicit by Donnellan's analysis and Kripke's. According to the framework, every statement is made by means of a sentence containing a description in subject-position and a predicate which is attributed to the description. From the standpoint of the predicate, the statement will be true or false depending on whether the description succeeds in referring to something. From the standpoint of the description, an exhaustive application of the Kripkean analysis reveals that its referring use will involve the following cases: i) the semantic referent of the description coincides with the speaker's referent, thus originating two sub-cases:  $i_a$ ) the semantic referent and the speaker's referent correspond to an object in the world;  $i_b$ ) the semantic referent and the speaker's referent are both empty; ii) the semantic referent of the description does not coincide with the speaker's referent, thus originating three sub-cases:  $ii_a$ ) the semantic referent and the speaker's referent correspond to different objects in the world;  $ii_b$ ) the semantic referent is empty, whereas the speaker's referent corresponds to an



object in the world;  $ii_c$ ) the semantic referent corresponds to an object in the world, whereas the speaker's referent is empty. Since the above classification is based upon the coincidence or not between the semantic and the speaker's referent, I shall call case 'i' and its sub-cases the *coincidental referring use* of the definite descriptions in subject-position; case 'ii' and its sub-cases will be the *non-coincidental referring use* of the descriptions.

Given that the general framework originated by the controversy around Strawson's question ultimately involves the analysis of the above two cases and their corresponding sub-cases, the restricted question concerning the referring use of definite descriptions in subject-position in the language-game of reporting an event will also ultimately involve the analysis of the same cases and sub-cases. As already mentioned, the language-game of reporting an event involves situations that are better explained by the appeal to the distinction between the reporter's referent and the description's semantic referent.

The above considerations reveal that the somehow hybrid question about the referring use of definite descriptions in subject-position in the language-game of reporting an event is the closest we can get to the semantic question about the semantic presuppositions of definite descriptions in subject-position as formulated in chapter 1. The considerations also reveal that sometimes, that is, in the analysis of a specific language-game, the question about the referring use of definite descriptions in subject-position, although not explicitly asked by the later Wittgenstein, may be taken as relevant in the "Investigations". In addition, the discussion in this section reveals that the newly formulated pragmatic question is entirely consistent with the philosophy expounded in the "Investigations". We may now pass on to

the next section, in which I shall start the analysis of the five different sub-cases of referring use in the spirit of the "Investigations".

#### IV - ANALYSIS OF THE COINCIDENTAL REFERRING USE OF DEFINITE DESCRIPTIONS IN SUBJECT-POSITION IN THE LANGUAGE-GAME OF REPORTING AN EVENT

Once the pragmatic question is formulated and its framework is made explicit in consistency with the philosophy expounded by the "Investigations", I shall start the analysis by initially trying to make explicit what would be the later Wittgenstein's analysis of the occurrence, in the language-game of reporting an event, of the coincidental referring use of a definite description in subject-position. As already mentioned, in the coincidental referring use the semantic referent of the definite description in subject-position and the speaker's referent are the same. But there are two sub-cases to be considered.

First, consider sub-case 'i<sub>a</sub>'. Suppose the language-game of reporting an event involves a context such that both the reporter and the hearer may identify an object as the reporter's referent. For example, both the reporter and the hearer are talking about Mr. Bush; the reporter is telling the hearer what happened to Mr. Bush and the hearer is familiar with the circumstances in a way such that he is able to pick out Mr. Bush as the man to whom the reporter is referring. Suppose the reporter uses the true description 'the President of USA' in order to refer to Mr. Bush. In the current sub-case, the language-game is such that the speaker's referent is a man identifiable by means of the context and the semantic referent of the description coincides with that man. This

might be called a completely successful referring use of the definite description in subject-position. Although the analysis is restricted to the language-game of reporting an event, this coincides with Donnellan's alleged *attributive use* which is actually Kripke's *simple case* (1979: 15). In this sub-case, the language-game would be such that the statement about the existence and uniqueness of the semantic referent is true, for both the semantic referent of the description and the speaker's referent correspond to an authentic object in the world. And we shall have either a true or a false statement, depending on whether or not the predicate fits the object referred to by the description.

We may now ask the specific pragmatic question as formulated in the previous section in order to find out whether or not a statement made with 'the President of USA is flying to Japan' in the language-game of reporting an event semantically E-presupposes that there is exactly one president of USA. Given that the current case involves only referential success, we may leave part 'ii' of the pragmatic question aside and only consider part 'i': do we use the words 'statement', 'true' and 'false' in the language-game of reporting something that happened with the president of USA in a way such that the assertoric use of a declarative sentence containing the description 'the President of USA' in subject-position yields a true or false statement depending on the adequacy of the predicate to the man referred to by the description only if another statement about the existence and uniqueness of the man described is true? In this case, the requirement of existence and uniqueness of the man referred to by the description is satisfied and a statement like 'the President of USA is flying to Japan' will be true or false depending on whether the predicate 'is flying to Japan' fits or not the man in question. All the above features may be obtained even though we abstract from the speaker's

referent. So far, so good, as long as the semantic E-presupposition is concerned.

But the above features are valid both for the presuppositional account and Russell's. In fact, both Strawson and Russell would claim that if the statement (or proposition) made with 'the President of USA is flying to Japan' is true, then the statement (or proposition) that there is exactly one President of USA is also true.

As a result, the analysis of sub-case ' $i_a$ ' is insufficient for obtaining an adequate answer to the pragmatic question as formulated in the previous section. We shall have to analyze the remaining cases in order to get the desired answer.

Second, consider sub-case ' $i_b$ '. Here, the language-game of reporting an event may be such that the semantic referent of the description and the speaker's referent coincide in both being empty. This might be called the completely unsuccessful referring use of the definite description in subject-position. Suppose the speaker is reporting an event and appeals to a definite description in a way such that the requirement of existence and uniqueness of the object to which the description refers is not fulfilled. In addition, suppose there is no person or object such that the hearer might spot as that to which the speaker is trying, although mistakenly, to refer. Under these circumstances, suppose the speaker's report requires uttering the sentence

(1) 'The King of USA is flying to Japan'.

From the discussion of sub-case ' $i_a$ ', it is clear that (1) may be taken as a meaningful sentence even though the United States is not a monarchy. This fact immediately raises the question: does (1) semantically E-presuppose



(2) 'There is one and only one King of USA'?

As it can be inferred from the analysis of sub-case 'i<sub>a</sub>', if the reporter sincerely utters (1) and it is true that the United States is a monarchy governed by King Bush II, then the hearer will agree or not with what has been said depending on whether or not King Bush II is flying to Japan. By contrast, sub-case 'i<sub>b</sub>' is such that if the reporter sincerely utters (1) and it is not true, as in fact it is not, that the United States is a monarchy governed by King Bush II, then the hearer may be aware of this fact and presume that the reporter is mistaken and reply in the following way:

(3) 'I am afraid you are mistaken. You are presupposing that there is a King of the United States, but this is not the case'.

Although the reply is somehow unusual, it would be a correct move in the language-game of reporting an event. Besides, there are other replies which may be equivalent to (3). But the main point in all of them is that the circumstances are such that, once (3) or any equivalent one is uttered, both the hearer and the reporter would drop sentence (1) as inadequate for the reporter's move in the language-game. They would try to find out to whom was the reporter intending to refer and replace the description in (1) by a more adequate one. But there would hardly be a debate about the truth-value of (1). For the language-game of reporting an event does not include the discussion about the truth-value of a token sentence uttered in the same circumstances as (1). There are no explicit rules about the status of (1) in the language-game, because they are unnecessary. The language-game of reporting an event is such that the truth-value game can be played with a sentence like (1) only if the object referred to by the description in fact exists uniquely.



Thus, if (2) is false, (1) is simply dropped as irrelevant for the language-game. Although (1) still has a sense, (1) becomes an incorrect move in the language-game of reporting an event<sup>5</sup>.

If we now apply part 'ii' of the pragmatic question to this particular case, the answer seems to be that the statement yielded in fact semantically E-presupposes the existence and uniqueness of the object referred to by the description. This would mean that the relation of semantic E-presupposition in fact holds in sub-case 'i<sub>b</sub>' in the language-game of reporting an event.

But such a favourable answer to the above question would be valid only if considerations about the speaker's referent did not affect the decision to leave (1) aside. Unfortunately, this was not the case. For although the hearer was able to grasp what the semantic referent of the description was, he spotted the mistake because he was not able to identify the reporter's referent. The decision to leave (1) aside was made with the help of pragmatic considerations. This is not surprising. As a matter of fact, it may be inferred from Kripke's discussion of Donnellan's paper that not only semantic, but also pragmatic considerations are involved in the analysis of the referring use of definite descriptions in subject-position (Kripke 1979: 15-22). Although such a universal claim is not in the spirit of the "Investigations", it seems that the claim may be restricted in order to be applied to the specific case we are considering. Following this line of argument, we may infer that (1) was left aside as irrelevant only because there was no person or object which might be picked out by the hearer as the speaker's intended referent. In the analysis of the language-game of reporting an event, this fact may be overlooked because, despite the importance of the speaker's referent in the referential mechanism

involved, we tend to pay attention to it only when it is different from the semantic referent of the description and a non-coincidental referring use occurs.

As a result, in the language-game of reporting an event, the analysis of the completely unsuccessful referring use when there is no person or object to which the reporter may be trying, although unsuccessfully, to refer reveals that (1) does not semantically E-presuppose (2).

Thus, the above considerations reveal that what would be the later Wittgenstein's analysis of the coincidental referring use of definite descriptions in subject-position in the language-game of reporting an event leads to the rejection of the semantic concept of E-presupposition.

Let us now pass to the analysis of the non-coincidental referring use and its sub-cases in the language-game considered.

#### V - ANALYSIS OF THE NON-COINCIDENTAL REFERRING USE OF DEFINITE DESCRIPTIONS IN SUBJECT-POSITION IN THE LANGUAGE-GAME OF REPORTING AN EVENT

Let us now consider case 'ii'. Sometimes, when reporting an event, the reporter may refer to an object in the world by means of an inadequate description. Here, the semantic referent and the reporter's referent are not the same. This corresponds to an application of Kripke's complex case (1979: 15) to the language-game in question and originates the three sub-cases above mentioned.

First, consider sub-case 'ii<sub>a</sub>': the reporting of

an event might be such that the description used in subject-position has a semantic referent which is different from a context-identifiable object that the hearer picks out as the reporter's referent. Suppose, for example, that the reporter wants to refer to President Bush but mistakenly describes him as 'the President of France' and utters

(4) 'The President of France is drinking champagne'.

Now the context may be such that the hearer is able to pick out Mr. Bush as the reporter's referent in (4). This may be called the successful, although incorrect, referring use of the description in subject-position in the language-game of reporting an event. In this case, the hearer's reply might be something like

(5) 'You mean *the President of USA* is drinking champagne'.

In this situation, the status of (4) is undetermined in the language-game. On the one hand, (4) contains a definite description which has a semantic referent, that is, Mr. Mitterrand. From this point of view, (4) is a statement which says something true or false about him. On the other hand, the reporter's intended referent was Mr. Bush. From this point of view, although (4) would hardly be called a 'statement', it also says something true or false about Mr. Bush.

Now according to the presuppositional account previously defined, the above assertoric use of (4) would yield a statement that semantically E-presupposes

(6) 'There is exactly one President of France'.

If we ask the specific pragmatic question in this sub-

case, we shall find out that the answer is: 'only if we abstract from the context of use'. For, as long as the semantic referent of 'the President of France' is concerned, we may use the words 'statement', 'true' and 'false' in accordance with the logical relation of semantic E-presupposition. But as long as the reporter's referent is concerned, we do not use these words in accordance with such a relation. Thus, we may say that (4) semantically E-presupposes (6) only if we abstract from the context of use. Since we are analyzing the referring use of the description in subject-position, we cannot make such an abstraction. Otherwise, we would be excluding the more important aspect in the utterance of (4), that is, the fact that, although incorrectly, the reporter succeeds in referring to a context-identifiable object and says something true or false about it. And this is based on the assumption made by the hearer -- after the utterance of (4) -- that the reporter truly believes that the semantic referent of the description used is identical with the reporter's referent. As a result, if the logical relation of semantic E-presupposition explains only partially the referential mechanisms involved by the utterance of (4), we must conclude that the complete analysis of the referring use in sub-case 'ii<sub>a</sub>' leads to a rejection of the semantic concept of E-presupposition.

Second, consider sub-case 'ii<sub>b</sub>': the language-game of reporting an event allows a move in which the reporter appeals to a description which fails to have a semantic referent; even so, there is a context-identifiable object that the hearer picks out as the reporter's referent. Suppose, for example, the reporter believes the United States to be a monarchy and intends to refer to Mr. Bush. He then utters

(7) 'The King of USA is drinking champagne'.

Suppose also that the definite description used in (7), although it is empty, somehow succeeds in making it clear for the hearer what the reporter's intended referent is. We would obtain an effect analogous to the one analyzed in the previous sub-case. Once again, we might call it a successful, although incorrect, referring use of the description in subject-position in the language-game of reporting an event. What is specific in this sub-case is that the reporter is saying something either true or false about the context-identifiable object, that is, Mr. Bush, although we would hardly say that, in the language-game, the reporter's use of the description in subject-position yields what we call a 'statement'.

From the standpoint of the referential, although improper, success, (7) is usually taken by the hearer as true or false of the reporter's referent. This means that the hearer was able to pick out the reporter's intended referent, although it does not correspond to the semantic referent of the description used in subject-position. In this case, the hearer believes that, once the reporter is informed of his referential mistake, both might replace the inadequate definite description by a correct one. For example, the hearer might use (5) ['You mean *the President of USA* is drinking champagne'] in reply to the reporter's utterance of (7). The amended statement will now be true or false of President Bush.

But from the standpoint of the inadequateness of the definite description as regards the object to which the reporter intends to refer, (7) might also be dropped by the hearer as an incorrect move in the language-game. This would depend on a decision to be taken by the hearer in conformity with the circumstances involving the utterance of (7) by the reporter. But then this would correspond to the case of completely unsuccessful referring use of the description which was analyzed in the



previous section.

Now we may ask the specific pragmatic question in order to find out whether or not, in the language-game of reporting an event, (7) semantically E-presupposes

(8) 'There is exactly one King of USA'

in the case we are considering. Once again, the answer will be: 'only if we abstract from the context of use'. For the assertoric use of the empty description in the language-game of reporting an event yields a very peculiar type of assertion which still succeeds in saying something true or false of a context-identifiable object. Thus, we can only say that the assertoric use of (7) yields a statement that semantically E-presupposes (8) if we abstract from the context in which (7) is used. Even so, this claim would be controversial, for Russell would claim that (7) false, whereas Strawson would claim that it is truth-valueless. But given that we cannot exclude the context in the consideration of the referring use, we may say that the circumstances under which (7) is uttered in the language-game are such that the hearer may assume that the reporter truly intends to talk about a determinate object, although the description used is inadequate and empty. Thus, we may conclude that the analysis of sub-case 'ii<sub>b</sub>' in the language-game of reporting an event also leads to the rejection of the concept of semantic E-presupposition.

Third and finally, consider sub-case 'ii<sub>c</sub>': the language-game might involve a situation in which the description used by the reporter has a semantic referent, but the hearer fails to pick out a context-identifiable object as the reporter's referent. Suppose, for example, that the reporter uses the description 'The Socialist Leader' in order to refer to Mr. Mitterrand and that the

hearer does not know that the President of France is a socialist leader. The reporter might assert

(9) 'The Socialist Leader is drinking champagne',

but although the hearer would easily understand what is the semantic reference of the description in (9), the context might be such that the hearer would be unable to identify anyone as the reporter's referent. Thus, although the description used has a semantic referent, the reporter failed in determining his intended referent and the hearer could not pick out a context-identifiable object. In order to proceed with the language-game, the hearer would have to ask to whom the reporter is referring. But as soon as both the reporter and the hearer agree that the description 'The Socialist Leader' refers to Mr. Mitterrand, the problem would be solved and the reporting of the event would continue. In this case, although an utterance of (9) may yield a true or false statement about Mr. Mitterrand, such a statement has to wait in a state of limbo till the reporter's referent is made explicit.

If we now ask whether the statement made with (9) semantically E-presupposes

(10) 'There is exactly one Socialist Leader',

the answer to such a specific pragmatic question seems to be that, in the language-game considered, (9) does not semantically E-presuppose (10), for the decision to admit (9) as a true or false statement belonging to the language-game is taken in function of considerations concerning the reporter's referent. What is more, the hearer would be provisorily keeping in limbo a statement with no referential failure. Here, if we abstract from considerations about context, we will be unable to explain this awkward situation. This seems to be an interesting

counter-example to Strawson's account. As for what would be the later Wittgenstein's account of the language-game of reporting an event, we are once again rejecting the semantic concept of E-presupposition.

Thus, our analysis reveals that what would be, in the spirit of the later Wittgenstein, a complete analysis of the non-coincidental referring use of definite descriptions in the language-game of reporting an event leads to the rejection of the semantic concept of E-presupposition.

The outcome of the whole analysis is that in all five cases considered the semantic concept of E-presupposition is to be excluded from the explanation of the referring use of definite descriptions in the language-game of reporting an event.

But this is not the end of the matter. The next question would be about the referential mechanisms effectively involved by the language-game. The answer to this question will require the consideration of other aspects of the account of language in the "Investigations". This shall be done in the next section.

VI - THE REFERENTIAL MECHANISM EFFECTIVELY INVOLVED  
BY THE LANGUAGE-GAME OF REPORTING AN EVENT AND  
SOME RELATED ASPECTS OF THE ACCOUNT OF LANGUAGE  
IN THE "INVESTIGATIONS"

We already know that the philosophy expounded by the "Investigations" leads to the rejection of the concept of semantic E-presupposition in the language-game of reporting an event.

If this is correct, the next question would be whether there is any pragmatic presupposition involved by the language-game. We might appeal to a variant of pragmatic presupposition, say the concept of pragmatic E-presupposition, which would be defined as follows: in the language-game of reporting an event, whenever a speaker sincerely uses in the referential way a definite description in subject-position, the hearer assumes that the speaker truly believes the description has a reference; if there is a referential failure, the utterance involved reveals to be an incorrect move and is dropped both by the speaker and the hearer. It is worth noticing that the pragmatic E-presupposition is such that only in the particular circumstances determined by the language-game considered there occurs a truth-value gap. It would be misleading to extend the above concepts to a general explanation of all language-games. What is more, expressions like 'truth-valueless' and 'truth-value gap' may give to the words 'true' and 'false' an importance and comprehensiveness which goes far beyond what ordinary use allows. The same reasoning would apply to Strawson's expression 'spurious use' in order to refer to our use of words in fiction (Strawson 1950: 331): he is giving to the 'referring use' a privileged status which in fact does not exist in ordinary language.

Now the question is: given that, say, (1) ['The King of USA is flying to japan'] does not semantically E-presuppose (2) ['There is exactly one King of USA'], would it not be the case that the reporter uses the definite description 'The King of USA' in subject-position in a way such that he pragmatically E-presupposes the truth of (2) when he utters (1)? Here, the answer would seem to be favourable in all the five cases considered. For in all of them the reporter sincerely utters a declarative sentence containing a definite description in subject-position in order to convey information. But there is an interesting

passage from the "Brown Book" in which Wittgenstein seems to reject the pragmatic E-presupposition:

"If I had said "When I told him that the train was leaving at 3.30, believing that it did, *nothing happened than that I just uttered the sentence*", and if someone contradicted me, saying "Surely this couldn't have been all, as you might 'just say a sentence' without believing it", -- my answer should be "I didn't wish to say that there was no difference between speaking, believing what you say, and speaking, not believing what you say; but the pair 'believing'/'not believing' refers to various different cases (differences forming a family), not to one difference, that between the presence and the absence of a certain mental state" (1934-6: 152; italics mine).

As a matter of fact, the concept of pragmatic E-presupposition is based on the distinction between the asserted, namely (1), and the presupposed, namely (2), in a way such that the reporter simultaneously utters (1) and believes the truth of (2). But in the above passage Wittgenstein is suggesting that when the reporter sincerely utters (1), he would merely be uttering (1) without having before his mind any "mental process" of believing that (2) is true. Thus, the mythological "mental process" of 'believing the truth of (2)' does not accompany the sincere utterance of (1). As a result, we may conclude that, in all sub-cases considered, the referring use of definite descriptions in the language-game of reporting an event would not involve the concept of pragmatic E-presupposition either. Furthermore, given that most of the explanations stemming from the Pragmatic Theories of Presupposition listed in chapter 1 would be based on similar assumptions, it seems that the later Wittgenstein would tend to reject all of them in the analysis of the referring use of definite descriptions in the language-game of reporting an event.

Thus, although the analysis of all cases of referring use in the language-game of reporting an event appeals to the consideration of pragmatic features, it



seems to reject not only the concept of pragmatic E-presupposition, but also most of the variants of the Pragmatic Theories of Presupposition.

If we take the analysis further, we may say that, in conformity with the philosophy expounded by the "Investigations", the Theory of Descriptions does not seem to be an adequate explanation of the referring use of definite descriptions in the language-game of reporting an event either. In fact, whenever the reporter utters (4) ['The President of France is drinking champagne'] or (7) ['The King of USA is drinking champagne'], he is not saying respectively that

(11) 'There is exactly one President of France and he is drinking champagne'

or that

(12) 'There is exactly one King of USA and he is drinking champagne'.

In the language-game of reporting an event, (4) and (11) are used differently and thus have different meanings. True, the truth-conditions of (4) and (11) are the same, but the later Wittgenstein does not define 'meaning' in terms of truth-conditions. As a result, the reporter would not find it necessary to utter (11) in order to mean (4) and the hearer would find it very odd if the reporter did so. The reporter would utter (11) under different circumstances, such as, for example, if the hearer introduces into the language-game any doubt concerning either the existence or the uniqueness of the President of France, the description's semantic referent. The same reasoning applies to the pair (7)-(12). Thus, Russell's account would not constitute an adequate explanation of the referring use of definite descriptions in the

language-game of reporting an event. But the Theory of Descriptions may still have an application, as it in fact has, in the languages of logic and mathematics.

What would then be the actual referential mechanism involved by the referring use of definite descriptions in the language-game of reporting an event? It seems that the mechanism does not coincide with any of the mechanisms proposed by the alternative models listed in chapter 1. Roughly, all the models seem to assume, although with some differences of degree, that the referential mechanism is to be explained by means of some sort of hidden mental process. Now the later Wittgenstein firmly opposes such an idea. In his words:

"As part of the system of language, one may say, the sentence has life. But one is tempted to imagine that which gives the sentence life as something in an occult sphere, accompanying the sentence. But whatever accompanied it would for us just be another sign" (1934-6: 5).

Thus, it seems that the referring use of definite descriptions in the language-game of reporting an event would involve nothing but the *referring use itself*. In other words, the referring use of a definite description in the language-game considered is not something co-existing with the description, something that accompanies the description in an occult sphere. In the calculus of language, the referring use has no autonomous existence and involves no "mental process". Paraphrasing the later Wittgenstein, one might say that we refer because we refer (Cf. Wittgenstein 1956: VII, 23). As simple as that.

The analysis so far reveals that, according to the "Investigations" and as far as the language-game of reporting an event is concerned, both the concept of semantic and pragmatic presupposition are dispensable in order to explain the referring use of definite

descriptions in subject-position. The same applies to the Theory of Descriptions. In this way, the Russell/Strawson semantic controversy reveals itself to be misleading, because it does not take into consideration the pragmatic components involved by the referring use of definite descriptions in subject-position. What is more, both authors assume the existence of a misleading common characteristic in the so-called referential function of definite descriptions, thus deviating our attention from the specific mechanisms of meaning that are involved in each particular case. The stubbornness of the successors of these authors in dealing with the idle semantic question concerning the referential status of definite descriptions only means that they are still lost inside the fly-bottle.

As already mentioned, the above analysis of the referring use of definite descriptions in subject-position is only valid for that particular way of playing the language-game of reporting an event. Nevertheless, I believe that we may extract from the analysis some hints concerning the main tendencies of the later Wittgenstein's way of thinking. For example, it seems that the analysis of some language-games which are related to the one of reporting an event would yield, *mutatis mutandis*, analogous results. Some of these related language-games would be, for example: other ways of reporting an event, many ways of speculating about an event, many ways of presenting the results of an experiment in tables and diagrams, etc. All of them seem to include, with minor restrictions, the consideration of the referring use of definite descriptions in subject-position by means of the Kripkean notions of semantic referent and speaker's referent. But in all cases the results would have to be restricted by the following qualifications: i) the general semantic question as formulated in chapter 1 is to be replaced by a particular pragmatic question concerning the

specific language-game under consideration; ii) there is no general answer to the semantic question, but particular answers to particular pragmatic questions concerning specific language-games. Although the later Wittgenstein provides us with no general answer to the semantic question, it seems that the particular answers obtained by the analysis of particular language-games strengthens the conjecture that he would tend to reject variants of both the concept of semantic and pragmatic presupposition for most of the language-games involving referring uses of definite descriptions in subject-position. In fact, most of the variants of the concept of semantic presupposition would tend to ignore the pragmatic considerations involved by the speaker's referent, whereas most of the variants of the concept of pragmatic presupposition would tend to appeal to "mental processes" involved by the speaker's beliefs, knowledge or linguistic background in uttering a sentence. Even so, the above features would apply to a very limited domain of our language.

The above conjecture is to be complemented by the following considerations. One of the basic features of Wittgenstein's view of language in the "Investigations" is the fact that it involves no general model of the functioning of language. In conformity with the "Investigations", every language is connected to a corresponding form of life (1953 I: 19; 23; II: 226). As a result, there will be as many different languages as there are different forms of life. Thus, as far as the referring use in some specific language-games is concerned, ordinary English does not contain or entail any general pattern to be followed by other language-games. This leaves open the possibility of constructing language-games in which the referring use of some expressions yields some relationships which are analogous to semantic presupposition.

For example, in the "Investigations" there are two possible ways by means of which a name may correspond to an object. In Wittgenstein's words:

"In a sense, however, this man is surely what corresponds to his name. But he is destructible, and his name does not lose its meaning when the bearer is destroyed. -- An example of something corresponding to the name, and without which it would have no meaning, is a paradigm that is used in connexion with the name in the language-game" (1953 I: 55).

On the one hand, a name may be connected to its bearer in a way such that it does not lose its meaning when the bearer is destroyed. As an example, Wittgenstein points to the fact that a man undoubtedly corresponds to his name, although the man himself is destructible. And if the man is destroyed, his name does not lose its meaning.

On the other hand, we may imagine a language-game in which a name corresponds to something and would be meaningless without it. This occurs when the name is connected to a paradigm in the language-game. As an example, I may quote the language-game described in paragraph 15 of the "Investigations". Here, the builder 'A' and his assistant 'B' are building a house; the tools involved bear certain marks; A orders different types of tools by showing his assistant one such mark; B brings the tool which bears that mark. Now if A calls out for a tool 'T' which is broken, nothing has been previously settled about this in the language-game. As a result, B's reaction would be to stand at a loss, or to show A the pieces. In this situation, one might say that 'T' has become meaningless, and this would amount to saying that the sign 'T' no longer has a use in language-game (15) (1953 I: 41). Here the name 'T' is associated with a mark which is inscribed on the tool, and which is shown to B when A is ordering this particular tool. Of course, the mark functions as paradigm in the language-game. And 'T' loses



its meaning whenever the object corresponding to the paradigm no longer exists. Although the relation between the tool and its mark is not the logical relation of semantic presupposition, the former has some analogies with the latter. For the association of the mark with the corresponding tool depends on the fact that the tool exists as such and is not broken or disappeared.

As another example of an analogous relation, I may quote language-game (48) which correlates the words 'R', 'G', 'W', and 'B' to red, green, white, and black squares. Thus, combinations of the words describe combinations of the coloured squares. According to Wittgenstein, there is a variety of cases in which we may say that a word in the game is the name of a square of such-and-such a colour (1953 I: 53). Among these cases, he considers the hypothesis that some people use these signs in a way such that there is a table correlating each sign to a different coloured sample. The table is used in teaching the language-game and functions as a court of appeal in certain disputed cases. We can also imagine that the table is a tool for playing the language-game. Here the speaker who is describing a particular combination of coloured squares has the table with him and utters a certain sequence of words after comparing each coloured square with the samples in the table and passing from the sample to the corresponding sign. In turn, the hearer is able to grasp the particular combination of coloured squares described by comparing each word in the sequence uttered with its corresponding sample in the table and passing from the word to the sample. Now if the table gets lost, or if there is no sample corresponding to a particular sign, then the table could no longer be used as a tool in the language-game. And the word or words with no corresponding sample would become meaningless. For the samples in the table function as paradigms in the language-game in question. So, the relation involved also

bears some analogy with the relation of semantic presupposition.

Actually, in language-game (48), a sentence like 'RRBBWGGWR' is true or false only if each word corresponds to a sample in the table. And we may imagine an expansion of (48) in a way such that the fact in question can be expressed by a well-formed sentence in (48). Suppose that the people who speak the language-game had the habit of using a word after checking whether it actually corresponds to a sample. Besides, these people would only use the word after it had been checked and confirmed. Suppose too that the language-game allows a sentence like 'RS', or 'BS', etc., which means that the sign represented by 'R', or 'B', etc., has been checked and does correspond to a coloured sample. In this case, the truth or falsity of 'RRBBWGGWR' would depend on the truth of 'RS', 'BS', 'WS', and 'GS'. Of course, a speaker of (48) might utter 'RRBBWGGWR' without previously uttering any of the confirming sentences 'RS', 'BS', 'WS', and 'GS'. For, on the basis of the well-known habit of checking and confirming each word in (48), the hearer might well take for granted that the speaker has correctly done his job and that each of these sentences is true. But this fact would not make the truth-value of any sentence describing a combination of coloured squares in (48) independent of the truth of the corresponding confirming sentences. Thus, Wittgenstein's later philosophy points to the fact that in some language-games the truth or falsity of a sentence depends upon the truth of another. And this is at least analogous to the logical relation expressed by our general concept of semantic presupposition<sup>6</sup>.

## VII - FINAL REMARKS

In short, the later Wittgenstein's account of language shows that there is no general answer to the general problem of semantic presuppositions of definite descriptions in subject-position as formulated in chapter 1. The "Investigations" entails a family resemblance account of both presupposition and definite descriptions. Even so, we may formulate particular pragmatic questions concerning the referring use of definite descriptions in specific language-games. Our analysis of the language-game of reporting an event reveals that in this specific language-game we do not use assertorically definite descriptions in the subject-position of declarative sentences in a way such that the resulting statement semantically E-presupposes the statement affirming the existence and uniqueness of the object referred to by the description. As a matter of fact, all the five cases considered seem to involve pragmatic considerations concerning the reporter's referent, whereas the concept of semantic presupposition abstracts from such considerations.

Although the analysis of the referring use of definite descriptions in the language-game of reporting an event includes pragmatic considerations, no pragmatic concept is involved. In virtue of its appeal both to the distinction between the asserted and the presupposed and to the existence of hidden "mental processes" in the speaker's mind, the concept of pragmatic E-presupposition is rejected. By the same token, most of the variants of the concept of pragmatic presupposition are rejected. As for Russell's Theory of Descriptions, it does not seem to offer an adequate explanation of the referring use of definite descriptions in the language-game of reporting an event either.

From the analysis of the language-game of reporting an event we may make the conjecture that the analysis of related language-games involving the referring use of definite descriptions would yield analogous results, that is, the rejection of variants of both the concept of semantic and pragmatic presupposition. Anyway, the analysis of related language-games would not yield a general explanation of the functioning of our language, but only specific explanations of the specific functioning of specific language-games.

In addition, the account of language in the "Investigations" makes it possible to imagine some language-games in which logical relations analogous to the one of semantic presupposition are involved. Thus, the above conjecture is to be complemented by the fact that, although the analysis of language-games involving the referring use of definite descriptions would tend to entail the rejection of the relationship of semantic presupposition, there are other language-games involving logical relations which are at least analogous to the one of semantic presupposition. This is the closest we can get to a complete answer to our question.

#### NOTES

1. Just to give an idea, see, for example, the later Wittgenstein's use of 'presupposes' or its cognates in "The Blue and Brown Books" (1934-6: 2; 51; 102; 111; 112), "The Philosophical Investigations" (1953 I: 51; 257; 270; 631; II: 179; 180; 192), and the "Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics" (1956 I: 6; 86; App. I: 6; III: 4; 54; 71; 81; V: 37; VI: 2; 11; 14; 17; 19; 21; 44; 49; VII: 25; 26; 47).

2. This interpretation of the later Wittgenstein's view on presupposition is suggested by Cooper (1974: 24 ff.).

3. More specifically, I believe we may say that when we assertorically utter a declarative sentence like 'P', we are using 'P' in order to convey information and making a statement. This is a particular case of Strawson's general account of 'type', 'use of type' and 'utterance of type' in "On Referring" (1950: 325; 327). 'P' would be the type involved. This does not mean I am taking Strawson's account as being the later Wittgenstein's. On the contrary: Strawson's distinction is too general to fit the later Wittgenstein's purposes. What is more, the distinction seems to originate from the passage concerning the Fregean "assumption" in the "Investigations" (1953: p. 11), and Wittgenstein does not seem very keen on such a concept (1953 I: 22). What I am suggesting is that Wittgenstein's account seems consistent with the fact that, by uttering a declarative sentence, we may use it in order to make a statement, provided we do not take the sentence as an 'assumption' to be supplemented by prefixes or suffixes like 'it is asserted that...' or '... is the case'. This is the only particular case of Strawson's account that I am taking as valid for my analysis in the language-game of reporting an event. Whether or not his general distinction is valid in the "Investigations" will not be my concern.

4. Of course, it would be possible to define a true statement in the language-game in conformity with Tarski's account, or by constructing an adequate formal semantics for the language-game, but this would make it too technical and far too distant from ordinary English. In addition, these definitions would require greater development and justification, and doing this would deviate us from our main subject. Thus, I shall merely assume that something like the Tarskian account of the concept of truth holds for the language-game of reporting an event in ordinary English.

5. Of course, the language-game of reporting an event is such that the expression 'the King of USA' might be used ironically or figuratively in order to refer to Mr. Bush. Although this move would be correct in the adequate circumstances, its analysis goes beyond my concern.

6. There are some other examples of language-games involving what might be called a presupposing idea. For example:

i) The language-game with the word 'pain'. Wittgenstein's analysis of the criteria going for such a word reveals that the referent is not identical with the behaviour which allows the application of the word. This seems to involve another sort of presupposing relationship.

ii) The system of assumptions which acts at the bottom of the language-games (Wittgenstein 1969). This



also seems to be connected with a presupposing relationship. But this claim is controversial. In fact, the system of assumptions was analyzed by Hudson (1978). According to Hudson's reading of Wittgenstein, the fundamental propositions which lie at the bottom of our language-games are in fact presuppositions in the sense of logical implications (1978: 97-9).

For reasons of space, I shall not consider any of these examples.

**PART THREE**

CHAPTER 5  
CONCLUSION

I - PRELIMINARY REMARKS

The aim of this thesis was to present the early and the later Wittgenstein's contribution to the controversial question of semantic presupposition. The analysis was restricted to the semantic presuppositions generated by definite descriptions in subject-position.

In this spirit, I presented the question with which I am concerned and discussed the main aspects of its framework. This prepared the field for analyzing both the early and the later Wittgenstein's historical contribution to the question.

In this final chapter, I shall discuss some of the lessons that may be learnt from the analysis of Wittgenstein's accounts concerning the problem of semantic presuppositions generated by definite descriptions in subject-position. In order to do so, I shall follow the steps below. First, I shall discuss some aspects concerning the characterization of the problem and the discussion of its framework. Second, I shall discuss the main aspects concerning the Tractarian solution to the problem. Third, I shall discuss the main aspects concerning the "Investigations" solution to the problem. Fourth, I shall try to find out what lessons may be learned from running through the whole discussion in this work.

## II - THE PROBLEM AND THE DISCUSSION OF ITS FRAMEWORK

In the first part of my work, I characterized and discussed the framework of the problem of semantic presuppositions generated by definite descriptions in subject-position. From the analysis of the controversy originated by Strawson's challenge to Russell's Theory of Descriptions I extracted the elements for formulating the problem. My first step was to characterize what I called the general concept of semantic presupposition. In order to do this, I appealed to the Strawsonian relation of semantic presupposition which is between statements and generalized it so that it might comprehend Fregean thoughts, Russellian propositions, Tractarian propositions, and later Wittgensteinian statements.

Suppose 'P' and 'Q' stand for a pair of Strawsonian statements (or Fregean thoughts, or Russellian propositions, or Tractarian propositions, or later Wittgensteinian statements). The main features of the general concept are: i) it is a relation where 'P' and 'Q' are mentioned and not used; ii) it is different from logical entailment; iii) if 'P' semantically presupposes 'Q', then 'Q' affirms the existence and uniqueness of the object referred to by the description contained in 'P'; iv) 'Q' has no semantic presuppositions; v) if 'P' semantically presupposes 'Q', then the negation of 'P' is not ambiguous as in Russell's case. On this subject, the following comments may be made.

First, the general concept is inspired by Strawson's analysis of the referring role of definite descriptions in subject-position. This may be inferred from the fact that in the definition of semantic presupposition, 'P' and 'Q' are not used, but mentioned.

Even so, the features of the general concept are such that it comprehends Strawson's concept as one of its instances. As a matter of fact, the general concept does not require that an expression may simultaneously have a sense and no denotation. This is a feature belonging both to the Fregean and the Strawsonian account, but not to the abstract logical relationship involved by semantic presupposition.

Second, as far as the purpose of my work is concerned, the relation expressed by the general concept was clearly distinguished from the relation of logical entailment. The problem whether presupposition differs or not from entailment generates a well-known controversy. Although I did not enter into this discussion, I believe that the definition of the general concept in terms of truth-values was clear enough to show that at least the relationship involved by my problem is different from logical entailment.

Third, <sup>the</sup> relation expressed by the general concept requires that the presupposed existential sentence has a peculiar status in all the accounts involved. In fact, all declarative sentences containing a determinate definite description in subject-position will semantically presuppose the same existential sentence containing the description in question in subject-position. What is more, the existential sentence presupposed has no semantic presuppositions. This not only complies with Strawson's claim that existential sentences have a peculiar status, but also reveals the manner in which the general concept deals with this feature.

Fourth, the relation of semantic presupposition as expressed by the general concept does not require that negation be ambiguous. Actually, the inconveniences which would result by assuming that negation is ambiguous would



be so many that the better conjecture is to suppose that neither Strawson nor the general concept requires such an ambiguity for the word 'no'. Now this raises a twofold consideration. On the one hand, although Strawson is not clear about this issue, the result of my analysis suggests that the conjecture that negation is not ambiguous is a better interpretation of his account. On the other hand, my analysis also suggests that nothing impedes a logician like Van Fraassen of constructing a formal system in which negation is ambiguous. In this case, the system would not be rigorously Strawsonian.

Now the main result concerning the general concept of semantic presupposition is that, although inspired by Strawson's account, the concept is general enough so as to include, as some of its instances, other concepts belonging to quite heterogeneous accounts. This feature revealed to be very useful in the course of my work. Actually, the feature allowed the construction of two instances of the general concept of semantic presupposition: the relation of semantic W-presupposition and the one of E-presupposition. Each of them could be tested against the corresponding system in early and the later philosophy, thus providing an adequate answer to my research question.

Of course, the general concept as defined in my work does not solve by itself the main questions that are raised as regards the logical relation of semantic presupposition. As a matter of fact, the difficulties concerning the construction of a consistent theory of meaning and the ones concerning the formalization of semantic presupposition are also difficulties belonging to the general concept. But the discussion of such difficulties was left aside. For the concept was used to serve the main purpose of my work, that is, checking whether or not the early and the later Wittgenstein has

anything to say about semantic presupposition. In this respect, the general concept revealed to be useful, for although the accounts involved are different, the relation of semantic presupposition expressed by the concept was applicable in every case. What is more, the discussion that followed throughout my work revealed that it is in fact possible to construct the general concept of semantic presupposition and test it against the accounts involved.

The characterization of the general concept allowed the formulation of the problem of semantic presuppositions generated by definite descriptions in subject-position: do definite descriptions in the subject-position of declarative sentences yield statements (or thoughts, or propositions) that semantically presuppose, in the sense of the general concept, the existence and uniqueness of the object referred to by the descriptions? It is worth noticing that the above question was not asked in order to obtain a full-blown account of semantic presupposition, but only to prepare the setting for analyzing the early and the later Wittgenstein's answer to the problem.

The results concerning the discussion of Frege's, Russell's and Strawson's account raise the following comments.

First, in "On Sense and Reference" it was possible to spot the important Fregean relation of semantic 'prerequisite' for definite descriptions in subject-position. The analysis of the semantic prerequisite and its comparison with the general concept of semantic presupposition revealed that the former is an instance of the latter. This confirmed the suspicion that Frege held a view of semantic presupposition which is analogous to Strawson's.

But the most important result in this stage was the finding of two different referential mechanisms for the Fregean proper names. The Fregean *simple proper names* are submitted to a semantic principle which can only be metalinguistically expressed, whereas the Fregean *compound proper names*, which include definite descriptions, generate semantic presuppositions in the sense of the general concept. This reveals that Kripke's claim that Fregean simple proper names are abbreviated or disguised descriptions is mistaken.

Another striking result was realizing that, although referentially dualistic, Frege's account is consistent. True, Frege claims that the existence of expressions which semantically presuppose the existence and uniqueness of their denotations is an imperfection of ordinary language. But Frege was able to prevent the inconvenients of such an imperfection in his logically perfect language by means of adequate stipulations. This revealed that simple proper names which directly refer to their denotations may coexist with definite descriptions which only indirectly refer to their denotations. In other words, the Fregean semantic principle may coexist with semantic presuppositions in the sense of the general concept. This leads to the important conclusion that it is possible to construct a logically consistent language that simultaneously involves the Fregean semantic principle for simple proper names (or any equivalent) and the relation of semantic presupposition for definite descriptions.

It was also found that Russellian logically proper names, although they do not have a sense, refer to their denotations in a way which is similar to the Fregean simple proper names in a logically perfect language. The logically proper names are submitted to the Fregean semantic principle.

Now the application of the above findings to the problem of semantic presuppositions generated by definite descriptions strikingly revealed that the Russellian logically proper names may coexist with Fregean or Strawsonian definite descriptions. This is so because the gap between ordinary language and the Russellian logically perfect language is so big that it may be filled in two different ways. The description in subject-position may be interpreted as reducible either to an equivalent of the Russellian paraphrase or to an Strawsonian referring expression.

In my opinion, it seems that this result was somehow announced by the fact that the Theory of Descriptions was formulated many years before the doctrine of logically proper names. Russell wrote "On Denoting" in order to solve the specific problem of the referential mechanism involved by definite descriptions, whereas his "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism" had the more ambitious intention to present his philosophical view of the relations between language and the world. True, the Theory of Descriptions was perfectly supplemented by the doctrine of logically proper names and followed the spirit of Russell's thought. But the fact remains that the doctrine of logically proper names might supplement another quite different theory involving definite descriptions as authentic referring expressions which semantically presuppose the existence and uniqueness of their denotations.

Anyway, this result revealed that Strawson's criticism of Russell in "On Referring" is mistaken. For Strawson anachronistically appeals to the doctrine of logically proper names in order to criticize the Theory of Descriptions.

The most important result of the whole



discussion in the first part of my work was the finding that the Russell/ Strawson controversy, as long as it only involves these authors' conflicting views of the relationships between proper names and definite descriptions, is undecidable at the purely semantic level. The discussion yielded the two following facts: i) the Fregean dualistic account of the referential mechanism of simple proper names and definite descriptions is consistent; ii) the Russellian logically proper names are submitted to the same semantic principle as the Fregean simple proper names. Now the conjunction of both facts revealed that, as far as the accounts involved are concerned, there are at least two consistent hypothesis in the explanation of the referential mechanism of simple proper names and definite descriptions. On the one hand, the mechanism may be explained by an equivalent of the dualistic Fregean account. On the other hand, the mechanism may be explained by an equivalent of the monistic Russellian account. This is so because definite descriptions have in fact an ambiguous referential status in ordinary language: they share the features of both referring expressions and predicates. What is more, the accounts of logically proper names and definite descriptions are relatively independent of each other. This means that they may be combined in different ways, yielding different accounts of the referential mechanisms involved by these expressions. This fact suggests the interesting possibility of constructing the formal system "F-Principia" which would be equivalent to the system in "Principia" except in that definite descriptions would be authentic referring expressions. Thus, Strawson's challenge of Russell's model simply revives the Fregean alternative model for the referential mechanism of descriptions. As a result, in order to be solved, the problem would require the introduction of further semantic or pragmatic aspects.



The above discussion provided the framework of my problem and prepared the field for the analysis of Wittgenstein's views in the second part of my work.

### III - THE TRACTARIAN ACCOUNT

As a whole, the analysis of the Tractarian solution to the problem of semantic presuppositions generated by definite descriptions in subject-position revealed that the early Wittgenstein adheres to the Russellian Theory of Descriptions. True, he introduces some modifications, such as: i) the appeal to two-place predicates; ii) the rejection of the identity-sign; iii) the claim that generality has a non-truth-functional character; iv) the rejection of the axiomatic method. But the analysis of the Tractarian modifications has shown the following results.

First, the appeal to two-place predicates is consistent with the Russellian Theory of Descriptions.

Second, with the help of Hintikka's analysis of identity in the "Tractatus", it may be proved that even though the early Wittgenstein rejects the identity-sign, the resulting system is expressively equivalent to the system of "Principia". But it is worth recalling that the identity-sign is rejected on the basis of a weakly exclusive interpretation of the Tractarian variables. Thus, by means of appropriate rules of translation, the Tractarian expressions may be transformed into Russellian ones and conversely. Although this is Hintikka's finding, it reveals that some analyses of the Tractarian corresponding aphorisms are mistaken. For example, the analysis made in Anscombe (1967: 148) is based on the mistaken inclusive interpretation of the Tractarian

variables.

Third, although no one knows for sure what the Tractarian treatment of quantification is, the best conjecture is to assume that it involves both the construction of logical prototypes and truth-functions. This interpretation has similarities with the one found in Russell's "Introduction" to the "Tractatus" and with the one found in Fogelin (1976: 56 ff.). If correct, it reveals the originality of Wittgenstein's account of generality. According to the Tractarian account, general propositions may be constructed without appealing to truth-functions. The latter would be necessary only for evaluating the general propositions. As a result, the mere introduction of the adequate symbolism would allow the construction of well-formed general propositions. And given that logic is the essence both of language and the world, the general propositions would be able to describe the world so efficiently as clusters of atomic propositions. Now this interpretation seems to agree with the spirit of both the ontology and the logic expounded in the "Tractatus".

Fourth, there are strong indications that, although the early Wittgenstein replaces the Russellian axiomatic method by the method of truth-tables, the resulting Tractarian system still is equivalent to a subsystem of "Principia".

Thus, it has been shown that there is at least one interpretation of the "Tractatus" according to which the Tractarian system seems to be equivalent to the propositional calculus and first-order predicate logic in "Principia Mathematica".

In addition, it seems that if there are differences between the systems involved in a way such

that they are not logically equivalent, the differences would not entail that the systems are radically different or that the Tractarian system is an original alternative to "Principia". In fact, it is more likely that the systems would have most of their theorems in common and that they would have to face only minor differences. Thus, although many Russellian expressions are ruled out as nonsensical by Wittgenstein, they may always be replaced by some Tractarian equivalent and vice versa, for both systems have the same expressive power. And if we supply a method of treatment of quantification in a Russellian mould, we can make both systems logically equivalent. This result is a corollary of Hintikka's proof that it is possible to construct a first-order predicate calculus without a sign for identity (Hintikka 1956). So, the decision of using one of these systems rather than the other is determined by practical reasons.

As far as the problem of semantic presuppositions generated by definite descriptions in subject-position is concerned, the above result is disappointing. But I took the analysis further and found out the following.

First, in the system W1, that is, the Tractarian system without the Theory of Descriptions, it is possible to construct the concept of semantic W-presupposition which simultaneously constitutes an instance of the general concept of semantic presupposition and complies with the Tractarian principle of bivalence. The concept of W-presupposition was constructed on the basis of the fact that, according to the Tractarian system, if an utterance is nonsensical, then it is truth-valueless. Thus, the relation of W-presupposition was defined as follows. If 'P' and 'Q' are Tractarian propositions, then 'P' semantically W-presupposes 'Q' if and only if: i) when 'P' is true or false, 'Q' is true; ii) when 'not P' is false

or true, 'Q' is true; iii) when 'Q' is false, 'P' and 'not P' are nonsensical and consequently truth-valueless. The relation of W-presupposition may be expressed within the Tractarian system. Even so, the Picture Theory of Meaning opposes the concept of W-presupposition. This result was obtained by interpreting aphorisms 2.0201-2.0212 differently from Black (1964) and Fogelin (1976).

2.0201-2.0212 was interpreted as an argument in favour of simple signs that rejects the concept of W-presupposition on the basis of the requirement of simple signs and the Picture Theory.

Since the Picture Theory appeals to a kind of isomorphism involving the primitive simple signs, this suggests that the isomorphic theories of meaning which are similar to the one expounded in the "Tractatus" would oppose the relation of semantic presupposition. For the latter involves an indirect referential mechanism that cannot be explained in terms of the one-to-one correspondence which supports this kind of isomorphism. In other words, if the description 'the D' semantically presupposes that 'D uniquely exists', then 'the D' is not directly connected to the object to which it refers, say 'a', but depends upon the truth of a uniquely existential sentence in order to have a reference. Thus, the connexion between 'the D' and the object to which it refers is indirect and not obtained by means of a one-to-one correspondence, as it occurs in the case of a proper name. This means that the expressions of our language would have at least two different ways of connecting with the world: some of them would be similar to Fregean simple proper names and connect directly with their denotations, whereas others would be similar to Fregean definite descriptions and connect indirectly with their denotations. Now this would involve the appeal to two different functions for connecting the words of language with their corresponding denotations in the world: i) the function connecting the

primitive simple signs with their corresponding simple objects; ii) the function connecting symbols for complexes (definite descriptions) with their corresponding denotations by means of uniquely existential propositions. Now only the function defined in 'i' would be consistent with isomorphism. The function defined in 'ii' is not consistent with the one-to-one correspondence which is required by isomorphism. As a result, the appeal to the relation of W-presupposition by an isomorphic theory of meaning of the Tractarian kind would lead to an inconsistent model.

Second, in the minimal system W2, that is, the Tractarian system without the Theory of Descriptions and the Picture Theory of Meaning, it was shown that the Tractarian primitive simple signs by themselves do not oppose the concept of W-presupposition. This is so because the primitive simple signs, which probably inspired the appearance of the Russellian logically proper names, refer in a way which is similar to Fregean simple proper names. Although the primitive simple signs do not have a sense, they are also submitted to the Fregean semantic principle. As a result, the model of language involving both the Tractarian primitive simple signs and definite descriptions which generate semantic W-presuppositions would constitute a consistent hypothesis.

The above analysis of the Tractarian account confirms my claim that the Russell/Strawson controversy, as long as it only involves the conjunction of any of the accounts of proper names and definite descriptions discussed, is not entirely decidable at the purely semantic level. In fact, the discussion on the degrees of incompatibility between the Tractarian system and the concept in question revealed that the issue is still undecidable in the terms of the Russell/Strawson controversy. For neither the Fregean doctrine of the



referential mechanism of simple proper names nor the Russellian doctrine of logically proper names is incompatible with definite descriptions which generate semantic presuppositions when in subject-position. Thus, the Tractarian view of primitive simple signs may be put together with an account of definite descriptions which generate semantic presuppositions. The gap between the TLP-language and the W-language is too big and may be filled by an alternative account to the Theory of Descriptions. The controversy remains undecidable if one only appeals the doctrine of simple signs. It has been shown that it is the appeal to an extra semantic feature, namely the Picture Theory of meaning, that decides the issue.

#### IV - THE ACCOUNT IN THE "INVESTIGATIONS"

The later Wittgenstein's solution to the problem of semantic presuppositions generated by definite descriptions in subject-position tends to the rejection of the relation expressed by our general concept. But obtaining this result required some important alterations in our research question as formulated in chapter 1. In fact, the Tractarian system provides an answer to a question formulated in semantic terms, whereas the philosophy expounded in the "Investigations" provides an answer to a question formulated in pragmatic terms.

Thus, the first important finding was realizing that the Wittgensteinian general pragmatic question, if applied to the words 'description' and 'presupposition', for example, yields family resemblance views that do not constitute a complete answer to my problem. The latter requires a more specific pragmatic question concerning a particular language-game involving both the referring use

of definite descriptions in the subject-position of declarative sentences and the relation of semantic presupposition. Although we would hardly find in the "Investigations" any stressing of the referring use in the same way as, for example, Strawson does, the specific question is in the spirit of the later philosophy. Besides, an answer to such a question would be the closest we can get to a complete answer to my problem. As a result, an alternative specific pragmatic question of which the answer would provide the elements needed for getting as close as possible to a solution of the semantic problem with which I am concerned was formulated.

The alternative question concerns a restricted version of the language-game of reporting an event. This particular language-game may involve the use of declarative sentences containing definite descriptions in subject-position with the purpose of conveying information and in this way may depend on the referring use of definite descriptions in order to be played conveniently. The specific pragmatic question was formulated as follows. Do we use the words 'the', 'statement', 'true' and 'false' in the language-game of reporting an event in a way such that the assertoric use of a declarative sentence containing a definite description in subject-position yields: i) a true or false statement depending on the adequacy of the predicate to the object referred to by the description only if another statement about the existence and uniqueness of the object described is true; ii) an utterance which is discarded as an incorrect move only if the statement about the existence and uniqueness of the object referred to by the description is false? This question defines a specific relation of semantic E-presupposition to be tested against the language-game considered.

Another finding was the fact that the

alternative specific pragmatic question concerning the language-game of reporting an event, although formulated in a restricted way, is connected with Strawson's analysis of the referring use of definite descriptions. Thus, the framework that supports the Strawsonian question is also connected with my specific pragmatic question. In addition, some aspects discussed in the evolution of the Russell/Strawson controversy, such as the ones introduced by Donnellan and Kripke are also connected with the specific pragmatic question. Although designed for more general purposes, the Kripkean notions of 'semantic reference' and 'speaker's referent' were submitted to some restrictions and revealed themselves very useful in the course of the restricted analysis. The above discussion suggests that, although the later Wittgenstein restricts the analysis to specific uses in specific language-games, some of the questions of traditional philosophy still have a room in the "Investigations". In my opinion, this throws a new light on the way the later Wittgenstein subverts the problems of traditional philosophy: in most cases, such problems are dissolved, for they are intended to provide a general answer about the general functioning of our language; in some cases, they may still persist in a restricted domain, for now they are intended to provide a specific answer about the way we play a specific language-game.

This fact led to the important distinction between the coincidental and the non-coincidental referring use of which the analysis has shown that the language-game of reporting an event in ordinary English involves the rejection of the semantic concept of E-presupposition. In fact, the two sub-cases involved by the coincidental referring use of descriptions in the language-game of reporting an event require considerations concerning the speaker's referent and this reveals the appeal to pragmatic, rather than purely semantic,

considerations. The same happens with the three sub-cases involved by the non-coincidental referring use of descriptions in the language-game considered.

Given that the specific pragmatic question concerning the referring use of definite descriptions in the language-game of reporting an event is answered by means of pragmatic considerations which led to the rejection of the concept of semantic E-presupposition, the next step was to ask whether the later Wittgenstein appeals to any variant of the pragmatic presupposition. The concept of pragmatic E-presupposition was suggested for the language-game of reporting an event and defined as follows: whenever a speaker sincerely uses in the referential way a definite description in subject-position, the hearer assumes that the speaker truly believes the description has a reference; if there is a referential failure, the utterance involved reveals to be an incorrect move and is dropped both by the speaker and the hearer. The analysis revealed that the concept of pragmatic E-presupposition is also to be rejected as an explanation of the referring use in the language-game considered. For the concept appeals both to the distinction between the asserted and the presupposed and to the existence of hidden "mental processes" in the reporter's mind. By the same token, most of the pragmatic theories listed in chapter 1 are also to be rejected as explanations of the referring use in the language-game of reporting an event.

As applied to the Theory of Descriptions, the analysis revealed that the Russellian paraphrase is not an adequate explanation of the referring use of definite descriptions in subject-position in the language-game of reporting an event. For a declarative sentence containing a definite description in subject-position and its corresponding Russellian paraphrase would have different

uses, and thus different meanings, in the language-game. Even so, the Theory of Descriptions may have a place in the language-games of logic and mathematics.

In short, the referring use of definite descriptions in the language-game of reporting an event does not seem to require any of the complex mechanisms involved by the models listed in chapter 1. The referring use is not something in an occult sphere that accompanies the sentence containing a definite description in subject-position. As a matter of fact, the referring use cannot be considered independently of the description used and does not involve any "mental processes".

Although restricted to the language-game of reporting an event, the analysis of the later Wittgenstein's account somehow confirms my claim that the Russell/Strawson semantic controversy requires the introduction of extra aspects in order to solve the question about the referring use of definite descriptions. In other words, the solution in the spirit of the "Investigations" was only possible by the appeal to the concept of speaker's referent which is an extra aspect with respect to the original Russell/Strawson semantic dispute. Thus, the framework of the semantic problem is shown to be too restricted and the question is solved by supplementing the original framework with some pragmatic considerations.

The analysis of a particular way of playing the language-game of reporting an event is not, and could not be, a comprehensive analysis of the referring use of definite descriptions in every language-game. Even so, the mechanism involved in the case of reporting an event gives a clue for the analysis of the problem of semantic presupposition in related language-games, such as, for example, speculating about an event. It seems that in most



of these cases most of the variants of both the semantic and the pragmatic concept would tend to be rejected.

Nevertheless, there are other language-games in which a relation which is at least analogous to semantic presupposition is present. This may be inferred from the analysis of language-games expounded in paragraphs 15 and 48 of the "Investigations". This fact suggests that the later Wittgenstein might accept, in certain specific language-games, some relations that are at least analogous to the one of semantic presupposition.

#### V - THE TRACTARIAN ACCOUNT AND THE ONE IN THE "INVESTIGATIONS"

At the end of my analysis of Wittgenstein's solutions to the problem of semantic presuppositions generated by definite descriptions in subject-position, I would like to make the following points.

First, the analysis of the early and the later philosophy gives some form of confirmation to my claim that the Russell/Strawson controversy, as long as it only involves these author's theories of proper names and definite descriptions, is undecidable at the purely semantic level. In the case of the early philosophy, the claim is fully confirmed. For the system W2 may be supplemented by one of two alternative ways of explaining the referential function of definite descriptions in subject-position: either the Russellian paraphrase or the Strawsonian semantic presupposition. The Tractarian primitive simple signs may be conjoined, without yielding a contradiction, either to the Russellian Theory of Descriptions or to the Strawsonian Theory of Presuppositions. In the case of the later philosophy, the

claim is only partially confirmed. For the analysis was restricted to the language-game of reporting an event and this is a very small domain of our language. Even so, the analysis suggests that some related language-games would involve analogous mechanisms and that the problem would be solved by adding the consideration of the pragmatic dimension concerning the speaker's referent.

Second, both in the early and the later philosophy, Wittgenstein opposes the controversial concept of semantic presupposition.

In the "Tractatus", the adoption of the modified version of the Russellian Theory of Descriptions and the principle of strict bivalence are the most evident reasons why the early Wittgenstein opposes the concept of semantic presupposition. But taking further the analysis yielded an important result concerning our problem. In fact, the shift from system W1 to system W2 revealed that the Picture Theory of Meaning also opposes the relation of semantic presupposition generated by definite descriptions in subject-position.

In the "Investigations", the analysis has to be restricted to specific language-games involving the referring use of definite descriptions in subject-position. But the appeal to pragmatic considerations entails that the semantic concept is not an adequate explanation for the referring use of definite descriptions. Although there are some language-games which involve relationships that are analogous to semantic presupposition, the appeal to the latter seems to be simultaneously too generic and too restricted. It is too generic because it puts the semantic relationship as the common characteristic pervading all cases. Now according to the "Investigations", the phantom of the 'common characteristic' must be avoided. It is too restricted

because it abstracts from the notion of 'speaker's referent' which is an important factor to be considered in the analysis of the referring use of definite descriptions.

Third, both in the early and later philosophy the reasons for opposing the controversial concept of semantic presupposition are consistent with the corresponding account of language. What is more, some of the reasons are original and instructive. On the one hand, the Tractarian Picture Theory of Meaning establishes an original kind of isomorphism which firmly opposes the logical relation of semantic presupposition and teaches us that any semantics that directly correlates the words with their references in a pictorial mould would similarly oppose such a concept. On the other hand, the analysis of the referring use in specific language-games opposes the logical relation of semantic presupposition and teaches us that such a relation unduly abstracts from the speaker's referent.

Fourth, in my opinion, I think Wittgenstein is right in his opposition to the controversial concept of semantic presupposition. But I would add that none of his accounts seems closer to the most adequate answer to our problem.

In fact, although the "Tractatus" opposes the concept of semantic presupposition, the philosophical price to be paid by the system is too high. The Tractarian transcendental semantics has the following unpalatable consequences:

i) Although the model is universal, it is too strict in the sense that it excludes from the domain of what can be said everything but the set of declarative propositions and their relations expressed by the logical

connectives. Thus, most of what is said in everyday language and philosophy -- if not everything -- would be relegated to the Tractarian index.

ii) The universality of the Tractarian model is based on purely semantic considerations, whereas a complete explanation of the functioning of language seems to require the introduction of pragmatic considerations as well. For example, the analysis of the referring role played by descriptions in subject-position includes the consideration of the non-coincidental referring use. but the latter has no place in the Tractarian system.

iii) The transcendental conditions of possibility of assertoric propositions also include the subject, which is a limit of the world (Wittgenstein 1922a: 5.632). But then the Tractarian conditions of possibility of language would involve the subject and the transcendental semantics would ultimately reveal itself as a transcendental pragmatics. This fact seems to obtain at least some confirmation from Wittgenstein's claim that solipsism coincides with pure realism (1922a: 5.64). But the blurring of the distinction between semantics and pragmatics even though it occurs at the transcendental level would be a high price to pay for adhering to the Tractarian model. For although definite descriptions are explained by a variant of Russell's paraphrase, the way they are analyzed in the "Tractatus" is still purely semantic and leaves aside important pragmatic considerations.

iv) The transcendental semantics of the "Tractatus" provides a too complicated model for the explanation of the functioning of definite descriptions in ordinary language. For Wittgenstein explains the rather striking fact that all propositions of the usually misleading ordinary language are in perfect logical order



by the relationship between ordinary language and the W-language of elementary propositions. Now it is the definiteness of sense of the propositions of ordinary language that requires the possibility of simple signs denoting simple objects. But insofar as we do not have any a priori access either to simple signs or to elementary propositions, the logically perfect language they build up subsists only as a transcendental postulate of definiteness of sense. And the fact that the propositions of ordinary language are in perfect logical order is explained by the postulated correspondence between their subject-predicate form and the unknown logical form of elementary propositions. Now this reveals how true is the Prototractarian dictum that the tacit conventions on which the understanding of ordinary language depends are enormously complicated (1922b: 4.002).

v) The Tractarian model may be accused of making an unnecessary duplication. As a matter of fact, the "Tractatus" postulates that the W-language is the fully analyzed form of ordinary language. The latter would be ultimately explained by the former. But then the above tacit conventions turn out to be far more complicated than one might possibly imagine. And perhaps what has to be supplied by thought without being put into words in the construction of every proposition of ordinary language containing a definite description in subject-position may exceed human powers. From this point of view, Wittgenstein's logically perfect language is a serious candidate for Occam's razor.

As a result, although carrying the seal of Wittgenstein's originality, the Tractarian solution to the problem of semantic presuppositions generated by definite descriptions in subject-position does not seem to be the best one. In fact, it is too strict, involves too many constraints and is ultimately unable to explain all the



facets of the referential mechanisms involved. What is worse, it involves philosophical assumptions which lead to undesirable consequences.

Now the later Wittgenstein's solution seems to be a better alternative than the above. For it does not seem committed to the complicated philosophical assumptions involved by the "Tractatus". What is more, the later Wittgenstein's intention is rather to dissolve than solve our philosophical puzzles. Even so, the later philosophy also has its difficulties. For as far as the philosophical assumptions are concerned, the later Wittgenstein has shifted the axis of the research from the Tractarian semantic standpoint to a pragmatic one. Now this raises the question of an implicit relativism as the philosophical price to be paid by the "Investigations". The later Wittgenstein's relativism may be inferred from the following considerations:

i) Wittgenstein's later philosophy, as compared to the one expounded in the "Tractatus", seems to exhibit an ungrounded shift in its intentions. It is well-known that the "Investigations" is committed to the task of describing ordinary language as it is in order to dissolve metaphysical problems. But the philosophical basis for making the shift in question seems to be unwarranted. The problem is connected with a passage in the "Blue Book":

"There is no common sense answer to a philosophical problem. One can defend common sense against the attacks of philosophers only by solving their puzzles, i.e., by curing them of the temptation to attack common sense; *not by restating the views of common sense*" (1934-6: 58-9; italics mine).

Here, Wittgenstein takes philosophical problems as resulting from the temptation to attack common sense. And his purpose is to cure the philosopher of such a temptation. Of course, the cure cannot consist in simply

restating the views of common sense, for that would be dogmatic. As a matter of fact, the philosopher's attack on common sense challenges the reliability of common sense itself and cannot have the reaffirmation of this very reliability as a reply. But then one may feel tempted to ask about the criteria for a Wittgensteinian cure of the philosopher's temptation to attack common sense. The only possible answer is that these criteria belong to grammar, namely to the way we actually use language in the particular form of life we are living. If this is true, these criteria give the foundations of common sense. Consequently, Wittgenstein cures the philosopher's temptation of nonsensically attacking common sense by making explicit the criteria of making sense in ordinary language. But he gives no grounds for these criteria. True, he cannot give grounds for them, because they lie at the end of the chain of reasons. And Wittgenstein acknowledges that he needs an ungrounded starting point in an important passage from the "Philosophical Grammar":

"I must begin with the distinction between sense and nonsense. Nothing is possible prior to that. *I can't give it a foundation*" (1931-4: 81; italics mine).

But if Wittgenstein does not give grounds for the above criteria, he is taking them for granted. One may begin with the sense/nonsense distinction without necessarily respecting the criteria of making sense in ordinary language, for this amounts to merely making explicit the foundations of common sense. As a matter of fact, one may mistrust these very criteria and attempt to replace them by more adequate ones. If so, the philosopher's attack on common sense may be vindicated. As a result, Wittgenstein seems to be in the very position he criticizes, namely the Moorean position of merely restating the views of common sense in order to defend it against the philosopher's attacks. The sole difference is that Wittgenstein, in a

subtler way, restates the view of common sense by means of the description of the grammatical criteria required for making sense in ordinary language. Thus, in order to cure the philosopher's nonsensical temptation to attack common sense, he describes the grammatical criteria presupposed by common sense itself. In my opinion, he is just relocating the problem. His attitude seems to lead to another form of dogmatism. Wittgenstein might perhaps reply that he is not restating the views of common sense at all, but only describing the way ordinary language functions and, in so doing, showing that metaphysical problems result from a misunderstanding of this functioning. He might add that the description of the functioning of language involves not only the consideration of grammatical criteria but also a whole system of assumptions which lie at the ungrounded basis of our actions (1969: 102; 105). Nevertheless, the reply only reveals that Wittgenstein's assumptions are different from the ones which tempt the traditional philosopher to attack common sense. Thus, he is in no better situation than the traditional philosopher himself. Ultimately, Wittgenstein is just confronting the metaphysical view with the grammatical foundations of the commonsensical view. And the grammatical foundations of the commonsensical view cannot be the judge of the metaphysical one with no further ado.

ii) Now consider the way the model of the functioning of language is confirmed by the "Investigations". The later Wittgensteinian approach seems to be structured in a way such that its final judge is the success of its application to language. But this creates a very strange situation. On the one hand, Wittgenstein suggests the possibility of replacing the theory of meaning by a mere description of our use of words. As a result, the polymorphous character of language is revealed and the great majority of metaphysical problems is

radically dissolved. On the other hand, the description of the use of words is not theoretically justified. There is no guarantee that the description of use in ordinary language will always yield the perspicuous representation postulated by Wittgenstein. It is true that up to now every single analysis performed in the "Investigations" may be taken as a confirmation of the account. But the oddity of some results seems rather to disconfirm it. For example, N. Malcolm's "Dreaming" (1959) may be taken as a *reductio ad absurdum* of Wittgenstein's method in the "Investigations".

iii) If Wittgenstein's later philosophy stresses the way we actually do things as the ungrounded end of the chain of reasons, then there is no privileged philosophical justification for anything. The ultimate ground is a form of life. But if this is so, then what is the reason for Wittgenstein's devoted and intense animosity against traditional philosophy? After all, it is the way some people do talk and act as regards some specific problems. Any description of our form of life would have to include the family of language-games of philosophy. The actual use of our language involves the philosophical one. What is more, the language-game played in the "Investigations" is actually used only by Wittgenstein and a small group of strict Wittgensteinians. The philosophical community does not exhibit a significant agreement about Wittgenstein's suggestion that philosophy is a deviated language-game. If so, why should the Wittgensteinian way of doing philosophy be privileged and preferred to the language-game played, say, in the "Tractatus"? The "Investigations" affirms that ordinary language is all right as it is, the only thing we need is a perspicuous view of its grammar. By contrast, the "Tractatus" affirms that ordinary language is all right because it depends on the postulated perfectly descriptive language which is prior to it and underlies any meaningful

language. Paradoxically, in the light of the "Investigations", both Wittgensteinian philosophies may be taken as based upon principles which are dogmatically stated and cannot be ultimately justified. Wittgenstein's later philosophy is in danger of succumbing to a subtler form of relativism. The above problem is connected with the question whether or not the later Wittgenstein was a linguistic idealist. For example, Anscombe believes Wittgenstein is able to steer in the narrow channel between linguistic idealism and empiricist realism (Anscombe 1981: 115). She thinks Wittgenstein's account entails that knowledge is not guaranteed by the language-game. And this means the later Wittgenstein has attained realism without empiricism (Anscombe 1981: 133). But her claim is made on the assumption that, according to the later Wittgenstein, there is not a right or a wrong, but only conflict, or persuasion, or decision (Anscombe 1981: 132). And this means that all our actions are guided either by our emotions or our will, not by our reason. As a result, Anscombe has only succeeded in confirming my claim that the later Wittgenstein is in danger of succumbing to a subtler form of relativism.

If the above criticism of the later philosophy is correct, two important consequences follow. The first is that the application of the programmatic principle atomizes language into a diversity of overlapping and criss-crossing language-games and impedes any unitary view of language as a whole or of particular linguistic phenomena. What is worse, the philosopher's task is reduced to the endless job of merely describing uses of words with no recourse to theoretical explanation. The concepts of family-resemblance and language-game are opaque to theoretical constructions. Philosophical theories, like the Theory of Descriptions or the Theory of Semantic Presupposition, are nothing but houses of cards to be demolished. The second consequence is that although



the programmatic principle is coupled with a theoretical view, a philosophy of language which intends to give away with all metaphysics, there is nothing which makes this peculiar philosophy, namely the language-game of the "Investigations", a privileged one in the domain of philosophy. Anyone may challenge Wittgenstein's reliance on ordinary language simply by blaming it for being based on an incorrect grammar and by restating the need for a logically perfect language. If so, not even deep grammar considerations would yield a perspicuous view of the functioning of ordinary language. As a matter of fact, there is nothing in Wittgenstein's later account which impedes such a move.

As a result, the account in the spirit of the "Investigations" only apparently seems to be better than the one in the "Tractatus". It is true that the "Investigations" seems to yield an account which is not so strict and does not involve so many constraints as the Tractarian one. But although apparently explaining the referring use of definite descriptions in subject-position by means of predominantly pragmatic considerations and thus avoiding many of the unpalatable consequences of the Tractarian system, the account in the spirit of the "Investigations" pays the high philosophical price of succumbing to relativism. This does not seem to be a good solution to our problem either.

## VI - FINAL REMARKS

Now the whole discussion throughout my work leads to the main lesson we may perhaps learn from the analysis of the problem of semantic presuppositions generated by definite descriptions in subject-position. The lesson concerns the epistemological implications of

the semantic and pragmatic models involved by the analysis of the referential role of definite descriptions in subject-position. It seems that Wittgenstein's solutions illustrate the epistemological limits which are imposed by the models involved. And I must confess that the whole discussion in my work leads to the puzzlement and perplexity one gets whenever a philosophical problem is exhaustively discussed. In order to make my point clearer, consider the adequacy of our pragmatic and semantic models in the explanation of linguistic phenomena.

First, the Tractarian account is firmly based on a transcendental semantics. This means the early philosophy is based on necessary and universal principles which guarantee the objectivity and the truth of the propositions describing states of affairs in the world. At first sight, this seems to be correct, but soon one realizes that the price to be paid for this is high: the account turns out to be too reductionist and too strict for explaining all the phenomena involved. For example, the Tractarian system is anchored in simple objects which make the substance of the world. This means that every descriptive language transcendently requires the logically perfect W-language which is in isomorphic relationship with reality. So far, so good. But the inconvenient thing is that language has to be reduced to the domain of description. Ultimately, the logic of language is the logic of description which mirrors the logic of the world. This seems to be too restrictive. In addition, every linguistic phenomenon has to be ultimately explained in terms of the W-language. As a result, the phenomena that are opaque to this kind of explanation are relegated to a mystically inexpressible dimension.

Second, the account in the "Investigations" is based on restricted analyses of specific language-games. These analyses are at the same time pragmatic and inspired

by the method of transcendental philosophy. They are pragmatic because the later Wittgenstein's main concern is the use of our words. They are inspired by the method of transcendental philosophy because the later Wittgenstein seems to be still searching the conditions of possibility of the language-games he considers. Now this means the later philosophy is based on particular principles that guarantee the functioning of determinate language-games expressing a certain form of life. From this standpoint, the later Wittgensteinian account seems to be a more adequate tool than the "Tractatus" for characterizing the use of definite descriptions in our language. But the price to be paid for this is once again too high: although the account is more flexible and explains most of the phenomena involved, there are no necessary and universal principles capable of guaranteeing the objectivity of the model itself. In other words, the solution in the spirit of the "Investigations" is able to explain a wider range of linguistic phenomena than the Tractarian system. But the unpalatable counterpart is that the end of the chain of reasons in the "Investigations" is a form of life, and not a rational principle. As a result, the later account is in danger of succumbing to relativism.

In short, if one stresses the semantic features, the objectivity is saved, but the phenomena remain unexplained; if one stresses the pragmatic features, the phenomena are better explained, but the objectivity is in danger of disappearing. I think this might be explained in conformity with the following line of argument.

On the one hand, the semantic standpoint abstracts from speakers and contexts, focusing the attention on the relation between the linguistic expression and its referent. Although the starting point is obtained in abstraction from the linguistic phenomenon as a whole, the above procedure leads to an important

objective foundation of language, for every expression will have guaranteed a referent. But the difficulties appear whenever one tries to find the way back to the linguistic phenomenon as a whole. For this will entail the introduction of new aspects into analysis, and the objective constraints imposed by the purely semantic considerations will resist to the widening of the aspects involved by the phenomena to be explained.

On the other hand, the pragmatic standpoint does not abstract from speakers and contexts, considering the linguistic phenomenon as a whole. Now the starting point of analysis has a wider range than the one involved by purely semantic considerations. As a result, the linguistic phenomena get better explained by the pragmatic standpoint. But the difficulties appear whenever one tries to give an objective foundation to the pragmatic account. For the foundation requires relating the linguistic expressions to their referents in abstraction from speakers and contexts, and this would mean to reject the starting point, that is, the consideration of the linguistic phenomenon as a whole. In other words, giving an objective foundation to the pragmatic account would require narrowing the aspects involved by the phenomena to be explained, and this would conflict with the previous widening of such aspects.

This awkward situation seems to reflect much more the limitations of our conceptual models in the explanation of reality than the early and the later Wittgenstein's particular difficulties in the explanation of the phenomena involved. But an adequate justification of my claim would be a matter for further investigation.

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