



## *The Ideal Language Tradition*

### Problems

## *Attacks on the Revised Project*



- The revised project, what we called the proposal-theory, was also not without problems, of course.
- Whereas the original project of Russell and the early logical positivists had been to invent an ideal language which would enable us to translate problematic ordinary language locutions into unproblematic formal ones, the new proposal would not entail any such claim to translatability.

## *Replacing vs Translating*



- In fact, instead of translating the ordinary language into a formal paraphrase, the ideal language was now intended to be a replacement for ordinary discourse.
- The adequacy criteria for such a replacement were laid down by Carnap, Quine and Goodman (but also Hempel and Tarski).

## *Presuppositions?*



- Of course, that account would not have the problems that we had discussed last week. It would not have to justify a criterion of meaning for example on any independent grounds. It would simply propose one and then see whether given that proposal we would be able to say whatever it is we want to say without falling into the same confusions and puzzles again.

## *What is the new problem?*



- The new problem with the proposal theory is however the question of its significance.
- Whereas with the old project, the significance was clearly a clarification of the things we were interested in, the new project was certainly also clarifying, but clarifying what?

## *Examples*



- Think again about Russell's story about definite descriptions.
- Here we had a problem, namely how it could be held consistently that 'The king of France is bald.' is just as false as 'The king of France is not bald.' and that – nevertheless – a sentence is false iff its negation is true!
- "Translating" it to the ideal language showed that these two sentences were no negations of each other.

### Examples



- Here the significance of such an enterprise seems clear: there is a puzzle in natural language that seems to force us into either very strange or even inconsistent claims. “translating” them into the clarified language shows that there is no puzzle at all – that the sentences *as they were* did not have a puzzling meaning.

### Examples



- Similarly the early attempts by Ayer were quite straightforward in these terms.
- Why are the pseudo-sentences of classical metaphysics meaningless? Because they violate the rules of language *as they are*. And we can see this when we translate them into the ideal language.

### Examples



- As we have said, this project was replaced by the proposal theory, since the problem seemed to be that there was no principled way to argue for the correctness of any such ideal language. There are many such constructed languages possible and it seemed best to be a pragmatists and pluralist about the choice, rather than a realist.

### Examples



- But how is the significance of a philosophical analysis now to be interpreted?
- What is now the significance of any reformulation of an ordinary-language sentence into any ideal language?
- The solutions we have just discussed would both be proposals to adopt a specific formal language in which a certain problem of natural language could not occur. Does that clarify the original problem?

### Strawson



- In his ‘Analysis, Science and Metaphysics’ (which is almost identical to his ‘Carnap’s views on constructed systems versus natural languages in analytic philosophy’) Strawson tries to argue for exactly the point, that the proposal theory would be without any significance for the problem of philosophical clarification.

### Strawson



- Strawson starts with the observation that the early translation idea had failed.
  - The sentences of ordinary language seemed to resist being forced into the molds which had been shaped by men who had preconceived ideas about the proper form or the proper content of the clarifying paraphrases.

### *Two successors*



- But what to do instead? Strawson sees two emerging projects of philosophical analysis:
  - If translation, as a philosophical method, cannot produce any sound results, it seems clearly necessary to abandon it. But it is possible, in abandoning it, to preserve something of what the analysts had originally intended. This can be done in either of two, apparently opposed, ways.

### *“apparently” opposed?*



- One could either retain the construction of clarifying paraphrases as one’s goal, while admitting that these paraphrases could never have precisely the same meaning as the ordinary sentences they replaced, or else one could retain the goal of explaining the precise meaning of these expressions, while admitting that the construction of paraphrases in an ideal language would not produce this result.

### *two deadlocks*



- There might be a difference in the conception of ‘clarification’. If ‘clarification’ means ‘explication’ then there can’t be a dispute.
- There might also be a difference with respect to ‘understanding’. If that means that a formal system is mastered than there is no dispute, similarly if ‘understanding’ means that we master the ordinary language and formal systems are essentially different from it.

### *what is the nature of philosophy?*



- The problem of the metalanguage: the notions in the formal language have to be explained at some point in the ordinary language. If we want to understand why the ordinary language tricked us into believing something, we need a translation for all points of agreement and disagreement – this makes necessary an analysis of ordinary language. But then, why study the formal language *at all*?

### *Five different enterprises*



- To resolve puzzles with a model language we must first descriptively analyze ordinary language.
- To explain alternatives to our concepts, we again have to inquire our concepts first.
- To see the same content with a different conceptual scheme, to see things more clearly, we again have to see where our original concepts were wrong.
- One could be just interested in the logical relations in ordinary discourse.
- One could be interested in descriptive metaphysics.

### *the role of ideal language*



- For Strawson the understanding of ordinary language is crucial for all five strands. Model languages seem not to help here.

## *Carnap's replies*



- Carnap thinks that ordinary language itself gives rise to philosophical perplexities even for those who manage it well.
- 'Clarity' is disambiguated as 'does not give rise to logical paradox'.
- Language is an instrument and only as good as it is suited to its purpose. Ordinary language is a good tool since it is as universal as a pocket knife, but for specific tasks we prefer less universal tools.
- Logical language can be learned and used without any metalogical translation.