IDENTIFYING KNOWLEDGE AND COMMUNICATION

EDUARDO COUTINHO LOURENÇO DE LIMA
Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais/CAPES

Abstract

In this paper, I discuss how the principle of identifying knowledge which Strawson advances in 'Singular Terms and Predication' (1961), and in 'Identifying Reference and Truth-Values' (1964) turns out to constrain communication. The principle states that a speaker's use of a referring expression should invoke identifying knowledge on the part of the hearer, if the hearer is to understand what the speaker is saying, and also that, in so referring, speakers are attentive to hearers' epistemic states. In contrasting it with Russell's Principle (Evans 1982), as well as with the principle of identifying descriptions (Donnellan 1970), I try to show that the principle of identifying knowledge, ultimately a condition for understanding, makes sense only in a situation of conversation. This allows me to conclude that the cooperative feature of communication (Grice 1975) and reference (Clark and Wilkes-Gibbs 1986) holds also at the understanding level. Finally, I discuss where Strawson's views seem to be unsatisfactory, and suggest how they might be improved.

The principle of identifying knowledge which P. F. Strawson advances in 'Singular Terms and Predication' (1961), and in 'Identifying Reference and Truth-Values' (1964) states that (i) a speaker's use of a referring expression should invoke identifying knowledge on the part of the hearer, if the hearer is to understand what the speaker is saying, and (ii) that, in so referring, speakers are attentive to hearers' epistemic states. This principle operates a central task in communication. However, this task has been overshadowed by discussions on no less interesting subjects concerning the principle and connected issues. Gareth Evans (1982) is a prominent exception. He has masterly developed Strawson's ideas on identifying knowledge, making their relation to understanding indisputable, and has also made interesting remarks relating identifying knowledge to communication. Yet, I think one may attempt to go a step further. I will argue that the notions of identifying reference and identifying knowledge make sense only in a situation of conversation. If this proves itself sound, identifying knowledge, ultimately a condition for understanding, will turn out to *constrain* communication. I will explicit what motivates this approach.

Since Paul Grice remarked that meaning is to be accounted for in terms of hearer's recognition of speaker's intentions (1957), it has been acknowledged that communication is governed by a cooperative principle that purposeful talkers rationally heed (1975). Grice's Cooperative Principle, from whence his maxims of conversation follow is "make your conversational contributions such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (1975, p. 26). And thereby Grice is able to explain the communicative phenomenon of implicature. H. H. Clark and D. Wilkes-Gibbs (1986) also draw upon this cooperative feature of conversation in accounting for reference. In the model they propose, talkers seek to mutually believe that the hearer has properly understood who or what the speaker is referring to, by means of various subprocesses of coordinated efforts of refashioning a suitable noun phrase (1986, p. 9). And thereby they interestingly construe referring as a collaborative process. Nevertheless, explaining how talkers assist one another so as to enable the hearer to understand the reference, and explaining how they come to believe that reference has been understood, is not the same as explaining what it is to understand reference. Theirs is a fascinating account of the *how* of referring (1986, p. 28), not of the *why* of understanding a reference. Therefore, a theory of understanding is wanting, and Strawson has just the right one to give.

There certainly are other and even better ways to motivate a theory of understanding. But this one introduces it along with the interesting idea of conversation as a cooperative endeavor. Thus this paper is not at all intended to be an opposition to the views sketched above. Actually, I am even sympathetic to them. Though I would not claim that Strawson endorses full-fledged versions of cooperative principles of communication, it is arguable that he is not heedless of them either, since he acknowledges that speakers' attention to hearers' epistemic states constrains what speakers say. Now, as a condition for hearers understanding sentences with referring expressions used by speakers, it is plausible to suppose that the principle of identifying knowledge also bears on communication. Actually, as I said above, one of the aims of this paper is to try to see whether the principle would not even *constrain* communication. In the last section, though, I will discuss where Strawson's views seem to be unsatisfactory, and I will suggest how they might be improved.

This attractive idea Strawson is veering to is unfortunately flawed by a partial commitment to description theories of reference. Now, it is not that difficult for one to get into a frame of mind in which identifying knowledge is taken to

be solely individuating descriptions determining the referent of proper names. Nonetheless, the principle of identifying knowledge is not to be confused with a related, but clearly different principle Keith S. Donnellan (1970) called 'the principle of identifying descriptions'. Nor is it a variant of the closely related principle Evans called 'Russell's Principle', since, as I will argue, conformity to Russell's Principle is not a sufficient condition for conformity to the principle of identifying knowledge. From whence will follow some interesting consequences. But to see all this, there is much to do.

<div align="center">I</div>

If we are to make sense of the principle of identifying knowledge in communication, we have to present it first. But not before contrasting it with what it is often misleadingly taken to be. Though closely related, perhaps even part of it, what follows is not what I will be willing to call 'Strawson's Principle' yet.

According to Strawson, the distinction between reference and predication ultimately is dependent upon the ontological distinction between particulars and universals. Strawson's means to approach this relation is to inquire upon what distinguishes singular and general expressions in the context of predication. Accordingly, the explanation he gives us is in terms of the distinct functions each type of expression is to perform, which amounts to, respectively, introducing particulars and universals into propositions (1959, pp. 180–1). An interesting idea, one that will accompany us throughout this paper, is that this introduction "*essentially involves the idea of identification*" (1959, p. 181). In using particular-introducing words, the so-called 'referring expressions', a speaker makes identifying references. One may say that the role a referring expression plays in predication is that of designating an object a predicate is or is not true of. Yes, but it is even more than that. A referring expression is used so that a speaker may let the hearer know *which* object she is talking about, whereby the hearer may be able to identify the referent (1959, p. 16).

A not uncommon way of reading Strawson's argument leading to the principle of identifying knowledge runs as follows. A central condition for an identifying reference to be made is that "there must be some true empirical proposition known [...] to the speaker [and hearer], to the effect that there is just one particular which answers to a certain description" (1959, p. 183). Speaker and hearer must be able to substitute upon demand an identifying description for the referring expression used, since referents are introduced in propositions through

empirical knowledge of distinguishing facts about them (1959, p. 193). In this reading, having identifying knowledge amounts to supplying identifying descriptions.

Nevertheless, the problem with this way of construing the notion of identifying knowledge is that, besides being quite misleading, it is likely to render the notion of identifying knowledge utterly uninteresting, in the light of criticism of descriptive theories of reference. In fact, Strawson's views presented in *Individuals* were one of Donnellan's (1970) targets. Donnellan criticizes what he properly called 'the principle of identifying descriptions', for not yielding what it was supposed to yield, viz., to "provide necessary and sufficient conditions for what shall count as the referent" (1970, p. 360). He draws counterexamples to the principle, purporting to show that the actual referent of a proper name does not cease to be its referent in case it does not fulfill the associated descriptions, and by the same token that another object satisfying them is not thereby the referent of the name. Since his arguments and examples, as well as those of Kripke, Putnam, and others are widespread, we do not have to enter into details here.

This negative part of Donnellan's criticism is likely to be correct, in spite of some problems concerning what he has to say in his more positive contribution (Donnellan 1974; for reactions Boër 1972, and Evans 1982). It is true that, *if* we were to defend Strawson against this charge, some replies are available. For instance, one may mention his acknowledging other modes of identification, *not reducible to* pure descriptive identification, and his linking up demonstrative and descriptive identification, as a way to secure descriptions to individuate uniquely. One could also follow Boër (1972) in trying to refute Donnellan's counterexamples one by one. But I am not willing to ground a defense in either way. Actually, what seems to be wrong with Donnellan's objections has nothing to do with failures with his counterexamples, nor with his groundbreaking historical theory of reference. I think that the problem is in inviting us to insist on construing Strawson's views in a less interesting, and arguably wrong way. As will soon become clear, the principle of identifying knowledge is more comprehensive than the principle of identifying descriptions, and more importantly, it is not intended to lay down necessary and sufficient conditions for reference-fixing. Thus a more encouraging alternative is to try to see whether the principle of identifying knowledge would not fare better in an account of *understanding* and *communication*.

II

Identifying reference and identifying knowledge make sense only in a situation of

conversation. This statement does not seem to be very evident. In order to adequately assess it, we first need to make clear what *identifying knowledge* is. At the end of this section, I hope that this notion will be satisfactorily clarified, so that in the next section it will be much easier to see how identifying reference is inextricably linked up with communication.

To resume, an identifying reference is a function of speech. It is an essential part of a full speech act of asserting *of* something *to* someone to the effect that it is so-and-so (1964, p. 75). It was said above that a referring expression is an expression used so that a speaker may let the hearer know *which* object she is talking about, whereby the hearer may also be able to identify the referent. Nevertheless, according to Strawson, making an identifying reference is not a sufficient condition for an identification to occur. The hearer may simply not identify the object referred to. Thus one may say that when a speaker uses a referring expression to refer to something, the identifying reference she makes thereby is unsuccessful, unless the hearer has identified the referent (1959, pp. 15–6). Put more bluntly, *if* conversation were a one-sentence affair, a temptation philosophers should avoid, and if no referent were identified by the hearer, nothing would have taken place. This all winds up to saying that there are *conditions* to be fulfilled in the performance of this task.

Yet, before considering these conditions, I think it is high time I begun drawing some examples. This one is extracted from Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mocking Bird*. Jem Finch and his sister, Scout, are playing outdoors, and have just came across a mad dog coming up to them. Jem, having noticed the dog, looks apprehensively at it. Scout, who is as yet unaware of what is happening, asks Jem:

(1) a. Whatcha looking at?
     b. That old dog down yonder.
     c. That's old Tim Johnson, ain't it?
     d. Yeah.

In using 'that old dog down yonder' to refer to the dog, Jem makes a demonstrative identifying reference, and Scout identifies the referent. In addition, she recognizes it as old Tim Johnson. Both his referring to and her identifying Tim Johnson are successful. Furthermore, Scout, in mentioning the name 'Tim Johnson' in (1c) also makes an identifying reference, enabling Jem to identify the dog as Tim Johnson as well. Afterwards, Jem calls Calpurnia, their cook, for help.

(1) e. There's somethin' wrong with that old dog down yonder.

       f. I don't see any dog.

Now, it is plain that Jem has once more referred to the same dog, even if his identifying the referent of 'that old dog down yonder' has not been carried out successfully, in account of Calpurnia's failing to spot it. Even if the propositional content of (1e) is fully determined, she has not grasped it, though Jem has.

    This example is useful for helping us through with the conditions mentioned above. In the first place, in order to accomplish the task of properly identifying reference, it seems to be plain that there has to be a referent the speaker is referring to (1959, p. 181; 1964, *passim*). In uttering (1b), suppose Jem were mistaken about there being a dog down the street, or were hallucinating, or just lying, or what not. Depending on which theory the reader is most leaning towards, this case, one of "radical reference failure" (1964, p. 75), results in either (1b) being truth-valueless, or expressing no proposition at all. As is well-known, the former is Strawson's view, while the other is the neo-Russellian, and neo-Fregean one. Whatsoever the preferred alternative, nothing was identified, and no identifying reference was made. In this situation of radical reference failure, neither Scout would have understood (1b), nor Calpurnia (1e), since there would be nothing to be understood in either case (1961, p. 61). To see why, we need to considerer another condition Strawson lays down.

    Talkers presume knowledge and ignorance on the part of each other, which allows them to be informative, and relevant (Strawson 1964, p. 76–7). Normally, there is no point in saying something one takes the other to know, nor saying things considered to be irrelevant or not graspable by the hearer. As regards identifying reference, which noun phrases may be used to refer to something, i.e., to let the hearer know *which* object the sentence is about, is not something totally open to the speaker, as long as he is willing to get through to the hearer. There is no point in employing an expression the speaker knows (or presumes to know) the hearer will not grasp. For instance, even after Jem has recognized the dog as Tim Johnson, Scout having recalled it, Jem does not use 'Tim Johnson' in saying (1e) to Calpurnia. Instead he reuses 'that old dog down yonder', having firstly estimated which objects she was in a position to know, and secondly by which means she was able to identify them. In his opinion, Calpurnia probably would not know who he was talking about had he used 'Tim Johnson'. Jem has selected an expression he deemed suitable, having evaluated how much of *identifying knowledge* of Tim Johnson Calpurnia and he shared (1964, p. 77–8). His choice proved a bad one in practice, though not an unwarranted one.

A subject is supplied with identifying knowledge of an object in case any of some non-exclusive epistemic states involving this object obtains (1964, p. 77). Strawson's list of epistemic conditions, in no way a closed list, comprises (i) spotting an object through perception, (ii) knowing an empirical fact which individuates an object—an identifying description—and (iii) being able to recognize an object which the subject previously only knew by name (1964, p. 77). Strawson also seems to include (iv) remembering an object—"He may rely upon [...] past experience" (1961, p. 63)—and (v) what I would call 'anaphora', following an analogous idea of Recanati's (2005, p. 291)—"He may rely upon information imparted by earlier sentences in the same conversation" (Strawson 1961, p. 63). Furthermore, nothing prevents other modes of identification to be added to this list. Beyond these, one may include the other ones Evans considers, viz., (vi) self-identification, and (vii) testimony. Regardless of how detailed the list is, the point is that a subject has identifying knowledge of an object, if and only if he is in an epistemic state concerning that object. Thus, swapping information for knowledge, in account of further requirements that do not need to concern us here, Evans gathers these modes of identification under the concept of *a dossier of information* (1982, p. 306, 399), and Recanati suggests a *mental file* of that object (2005, p. 292).

Now, having a dossier of identifying knowledge is not by itself enough to identify a referent. It also has to be used. Strawson's insight was to see that this is what referring expressions bring about. *A speaker's use of a referring expression* invokes *identifying knowledge on the part of the hearer* (1964, p. 77–8). For short, referring expressions are information-invoking (Evans 1982, p. 308). This all winds up to saying that identifying reference is successful if and only if

> the singular term used establishes for the hearer an identity, and the right identity, between the thought of *what-is-being-spoken-of-by-the-speaker* and the thought of some object *already within the reach of the hearer's own knowledge, experience, or perception*, some object, that is, which the hearer could, in one way or another, pick out or identify for himself, from his own resources. (Strawson 1961, p. 63)

If she is to *understand* the sentence, the hearer has to apply a piece of identifying knowledge to the referring expression the sentence contains. Put in another way, she has to link up the term with information about the referent of the term. As we have seen, there are lots of resources a hearer may invoke in her dossier. Yet, she *must* draw upon at least one of them, if she is to understand what the

speaker is saying (1961, p. 63). Coming back to the example above, Scout under-stands (1b) by identifying the referent of the complex demonstrative 'that old dog down yonder'. Jem's having uttered (1b) *invoked* in Scout the appropriate iden-tifying knowledge, inciting her to perceptually discriminate what he was talking about. In locating the dog, she further recognizes it as Tim Johnson, drawing again upon other kinds of epistemic resources available to her—e.g., she may be remembering theirs having fed it once, and the dog's master telling them its name. Now it is Scout's turn to invoke identifying knowledge in Jem in uttering (1c). That also explains why Scout has understood 'That old dog down yonder', while Calpurnia has not. Scout was able to perceptually discriminate the dog, and brought this information to bear to (1b). Calpurnia, having failed to see the dog, gathered no information whatsoever about it, and so she had nothing to link up with the referring expression. In addition, one may explain the situation described above about Jem lying or hallucinating that there was a mad dog ap-proaching them as a case of no information available to Scout and Calpurnia to exploit.

Furthermore, what has to be clearly understood is that identifying knowledge is not reference-fixing. A dossier of information to be linked up with a referring expression is individuated relationally by its source, i.e., it is about the referent solely in virtue of the referent being the source of the information gathered, and not because of its satisfying this or that piece of identifying knowledge (Bezuiden-hout 1997, p. 390) Thus, the truth or accuracy of identifying knowledge filed in a dossier of information invoked by the use of a referring expression, as long as we are not dealing with pure descriptive identification is not a condition for the proposition to be true or false. The truth-value of a singular proposition depends solely on how things are with the referent. Identifying knowledge is *truth-conditional irrelevant* (Recanati 1993, p. 103–6). Invoking a dossier of infor-mation is a condition for a proposition *to be grasped*, not to be true. Thus, it is now clear why Donnellan's criticism does not affect but item (ii) of the princi-ple of identifying knowledge, viz., supplying an identifying description. There is more to it than pure descriptive identification, the exact concession Donnellan was after (Donnellan 1970, p. 376).

III

This close relation between identifying reference and identifying knowledge in the context of communication is what I will henceforth be calling 'Strawson's

Principle': (i) that a speaker's use of a referring expression should invoke identifying knowledge on the part of the hearer, if the hearer is to understand what the speaker is saying; (ii) that, in so referring, speakers are attentive to hearers' epistemic states.

Now, the similarity to the principle Evans calls 'Russell's Principle' is striking, though it is not quite accurate to superpose one onto the other. In comparing them, one may better grasp where Strawson's Principle innovates. Russell's Principle states that "a subject cannot make a judgment about something unless he knows which object his judgment is about" (Evans 1982, p. 89). As is well-known, there are two means of accomplishing this, either knowing something by acquaintance or by description. The latter is knowing that there is something, or rather just one thing satisfying a description, as when "I know that the candidate who gets most votes will be elected, though I do not know who is the candidate who will get most votes" (Russell 1910, p. 108). The former is a sense of knowledge construed as a more direct epistemic relation, what Russell calls 'knowledge of things', and is grammatically represented by the verb 'know' taking a direct object, as in 'I know him', in contradistinction to taking a clause, as in 'I know that p'. But since as with Strawson's Principle we are concerned with understanding, and not just with saying, it is useful to recast these grammatically different representations in terms of objects of thought. Following a distinction of Prior's (1971, pp. 3–4), one may say that to know something by acquaintance is to take it as an object of thought in the sense of what we think *about*, in contrast to the sense of what we think. For instance, in uttering

(2)   That grass is green.

while looking at a house's lawn, what we think is that *that grass is green*, i.e., a proposition, whereas what we think about is *that grass*, i.e., a thing. To sum it up, in understanding (2), one is perceptually acquainted with that lawn.

It is true that Russell succeeded in restricting the class of objects of acquaintance to things whose existence is doubtless to the subject, viz., universals, the self, and—as the old skeptical tale goes—*sense data*, thus awkwardly keeping out persons, ordinary things, and events. But Russell's is not a compulsory choice, for the principle of acquaintance, and the things he takes as possible objects of acquaintance are independently motivated. That means that the adoption of one does not commit us to adopt the other. As McDowell (1986) has argued, the only assumption that motivates his selection is avoiding the upshot that a subject may be deluded about her own mental states. If this consequence does

not trouble us, we can drop this motivation altogether, thus enlarging the class. More importantly though, as Peacocke (1983) has remarked, Russell's notion of acquaintance remains correct independently of what one takes the class of objects of acquaintance to comprise.

Now that I have presented both views on what it is for someone to know an object, and to be able to understand sentences in which referring expressions occur, it is worthwhile to point out what is missing from Russell's, but not from Strawson's Principle. Russell's Principle is an egocentrically orientated principle, related to a single subject perspective. It concerns what *someone* has to know in order to understand a sentence, to grasp the proposition expressed thereby, and first and foremost to *think* about particular objects. It is an extremely important principle, yet it seems not to explain communication.

On the other hand, Strawson shifts the discussion on reference to an intersubjective perspective, acknowledging the social setting inherent to referring practices. He takes into consideration speakers and hearers, as well as the identifying knowledge they happen to possess. It is not a version of Russell's Principle, or just an alternative way of spelling it out, since Strawson's Principle considers not only what speaker and hearer know, ignore, or presume to know that would enable them to understand a sentence, and to think about objects, but also what one takes the other to know, ignore, or presume to know in order to make sentences intelligible to one another. And even more importantly, it shows how heeding the conditions for understanding *constrains* our ordinary referring practices. Nevertheless, as Evans remarks, identifying knowledge bears on understanding because it "is linked, via Russell's Principle, to the ascription of thoughts" (1982, p. 92). Thus, in so far as Strawson's Principle bears on thought and understanding, one may deem it an enhanced variant of Russell's. In addition, it also has something to say on communication. But let us not exaggerate. Strawson's Principle does not seem to explain more complex patterns of conversation, as Clark and Wilkes-Gibbs have shown.

Finally, this communicative perspective introduced by Strawson's Principle entitles us to claim that conformity to Russell's Principle does not imply conformity to Strawson's Principle. The reason for claiming this is that conforming to Strawson's Principle *is something a subject cannot do alone*. In the first place, either both hearer and speaker, or, as I will argue next, just the hearer must discriminate the object of reference, must understand what is said. A speaker's having understood what she herself says—consequently fulfilling Russell's Principle—does not imply that the hearer has also understood—thus not fulfilling Strawson's Princi-

ple. Secondly, Russell's Principle says nothing about speakers being attentive to hearers' epistemic states, since there simply are no hearers. Nothing to that effect can be extracted from Russell's Principle. It may be objected that, at least in *lonely* self-reference, conditions are such that Russell's and Strawson's principles coincide. Even if this objection was granted, I am not sure it is communication one is now talking about. Actually, without a hearer, it would be rather superfluous to bring Strawson's Principle to bear. Strawson's notions of identifying reference and identifying knowledge make sense only in a situation of conversation.

IV

In 'On Referring', Strawson remarks that "the task of forestalling [the question 'Who are you talking about?'...] is the referring (or identifying) task" (1950, p. 17). Now, in the model of cooperative reference Clark and Wilkes-Gibbs proposed, a breakthrough is reached when talkers come to agree that the hearer has understood the speaker's reference, after both have gone through a coordinated process of seeking a suitable noun phrase. In describing this mutual acceptance process, there are two basic shifting stages, viz., a presentation and an acceptance of a noun phrase (Clark and Wilkes-Gibbs 1986, p. 9). For instance, adapting a similar example the authors draw, consider an expanded version of the exchange between Jem and Calpurnia.

(3)   a. There's somethin' wrong with that old dog.
         b. Pardon?
         c. That old dog down yonder, there's somethin' wrong with him.
         d. That old what?
         e. Dog.
         f. I don't see any dog.
         g. Can't you see that brown dog down yonder?
         h. Yeah, now I see it.

In (3a), Jem presented the referring expression 'that old dog' to Calpurnia, a noun phrase he deemed adequate for her to know *which* object he would like to talk about. However, she did not understand him. He then presented a refashioned noun phrase, 'that old dog down yonder', but again Calpurnia has not accepted his presentation, letting him know it by uttering (3d), "That old what?" She

might not have paid enough attention, or there might have been someone talking loud near them. They clearly cooperate to get Calpurnia to understand what Jem is referring to. But not until (3h) has been uttered, the referring or identifying task, the task of forestalling the question "Who are you talking about?," has been accomplished. Now, why does Calpurnia understand the reference in (3g), but not in (3a, c, e)? Why has Jim used 'that brown dog down yonder', instead of 'that *Canis familiares* down yonder', or 'that thing', or just 'that'? Why is the former noun phrase, and not the last two, deemed adequate? Why hasn't an agreement been reached before in the conversation (3g)? The point of the model of Clark and Wilkes-Gibbs is to show how talkers come to agree that the hearer has understood the reference. Strawson's theory shows *why* the hearer has understood the reference.

Now, communicative referring practices are constrained by understanding conditions. It is no longer totally open to the speaker to use whatsoever co-referring noun phrase is available, as long as she is attentive to the hearer's epistemic state. As Strawson has shown, a use of a referring expression should invoke identifying knowledge on the part of the hearer, and the hearer should bring her invoked dossier of information to bear upon what the speaker says, if she is to understand the speaker. These are complementary tasks, but are also tasks a subject cannot do alone. Thus, it seems that the cooperative feature of communication, or the collaborative feature of referring *holds also at the understanding level*. Presenting a noun phrase is invoking identifying knowledge, while accepting the noun phrase is bringing invoked identifying knowledge to bear. Put more intuitively, a hearer's understanding a speaker is inextricably connected with the speaker's getting through to the hearer. Thus, in the first example at the beginning of this paper, Calpurnia's failing to grasp (1e), "There's somethin' wrong with that old dog down yonder," may be accounted for either by her failing to perceptually spot the dog, or by Jem's failing to properly gauge Calpurnia's epistemic resources. Had he considered that Calpurnia, a cook much older than Scout, might not see as accurately as his sister, he would most likely have used a more descriptively detailed referring expression, or waited till the dog came closer. Though the community of identifying knowledge be large, the extent to which Calpurnia's dossier shares in it was smaller than Jem presumed it to be. At least, it was not sufficient for her to identify the referent of 'that old dog down yonder'.

Nevertheless, I have been quite partial to Strawson in the examples I have so far drawn. Since they are all conversations, and Strawson usually analyzes

isolated utterances, I may have been raising some eyebrows. Yet, I am not claiming Strawson advances a model of conversation. If that were the case, I would certainly be guilty of most of Clark and Wilkes-Gibbs's charges against the idealizations of literary models of referring (1986, p. 3). However, a couple of remarks about Strawson's theory may render it more germane to conversational analyses. In the first place, it seems clear that his views also apply to other speech acts besides assertion. In asking "Who's Strawson?", the speaker also invokes identifying knowledge in the hearer, if the hearer can give a satisfactory answer. The same goes with giving orders: "You catch that ball right now!" Secondly, in what follows I will try to show that some conditions Strawson lays down do not need to hold during the entire conversation: (i) hearer's *antecedent* identifying knowledge, and (ii) speaker's *shared* identifying knowledge.

It is possible to drop Strawson's requirement that identifying knowledge should be possessed *antecedently* to the *utterance* of a sentence that invokes it. Borg, though arguing against Strawson and Evans makes an interesting remark to the effect that acquiring identifying knowledge of the referent is something a hearer can do sometime *after* the sentence has been uttered (2004, p. 188). She couches her remark on the following example: Looking alone out of the window, a speaker utters

(4)   That is the woman I saw yesterday.

The hearer approaches the window and sees the woman. In this case, the hearer acquires perceptually identifying knowledge of the referent after the utterance of (4). However, even if the sentence was uttered prior to the hearer's coming to know who the speaker was referring to, still the hearer would not have understood (4) until she had seen the woman and thought something like, as Evans would put it, "That woman was seen by her yesterday: that's what the speaker is saying." Dropping that identifying knowledge should be possessed antecedently to the utterance, does not amount to dropping that identifying knowledge should be possessed at the time of understanding the utterance. Yet Borg's example at least shows that acquiring a piece of identifying knowledge, and understanding a sentence that invokes it may take place simultaneously. Nevertheless, the point of the argument is that a speaker may begin a conversation without presuming identifying knowledge on the part of hearer. And if my relating Strawson's views with Clark and Wilkes-Gibbs's is sound, part of the conversation may actually be devoted to the hearer's acquiring identifying knowledge, or even to lead the hearer to apply the right piece of identifying knowledge to the utterance. That

would probably happen in case the speaker somehow realized that the identifying knowledge invoked in the hearer by her use of a referring expression was of the wrong kind. For instance,

(5)   a. Did you know Strawson will give a talk here next month?
        b. Strawson? I thought he was. . . .
        c. Oh, no, I mean *Galen* Strawson, his son.
        d. Oh, I didn't know.

Strawson also said that, in choosing a suitable referring expression, a speaker relies on knowledge about the referent she *shares* with the hearer. But that does not seem to be necessary. Strawson has pointed out that there are a hearer's sense, and a speaker's sense of 'identify' (1959, p. 16). As remarked before, that means that a speaker's making an identifying reference is not a sufficient condition for the hearer's actually identifying a particular referent. Such situations are typical of Clark and Wilkes-Gibb's model: the speaker may use a name whose referent the hearer does not know, or would not have identified yet. Now, I wonder whether the converse is not also true. The hearer's identifying a referent does not imply that the speaker also has identified it. It is clear that that is in utter contravention of the conditions Strawson has laid down in *Individuals* for the introduction of particulars into propositions (1959, p. 183). Suppose your printer is out of order. While on the phone, someone from the customers' service says:

(6)   a. Now open the printer's lid and try poking at a tiny cable inside.

You have no idea where this cable is, and upon requesting this information, you listen

(6)   b. Do you see this green cable, right under the toner?
        c. Yeah, now I see it.

Now, you identify the referent of 'this green cable' in (6b) through perception, locating it spatially in a way the support technician on the phone could not. He does not even see it. However, 'this green cable' was a phrase the technician used, not you. As Evans has remarked, in cases like that the speaker may exploit a "linguistic device which he does not himself properly understand" (Evans 1982, p. 92; see also McGinn 1981/1999, pp. 206–7), making "a fully conventional information-invoking use of a singular term to secure identification of an object of which he himself has no information" (1982, p. 316). That is possible

once the distinct requirements for understanding (6b) and for saying (6b) are acknowledged. Invoking identifying knowledge is a requirement for *understanding*. Thus, just saying (6b) does not require it. As a result, having adequately heeded the principle, the technician's use of 'this green cable' invokes suitable identifying knowledge on the part of the printer's owner, though it is a piece of knowledge he himself does not possess. What he can simply say, the hearer can also understand.[1]

References

Bezuidenhout, A. 1997. "Pragmatics, Semantic Underdetermination and the Referential/Attributive Distinction." *Mind* **106** (423): 375–409.

Boër, S. E. 1972. "Reference and Identifying Descriptions." *The Philosophical Review* **81** (2): 208–28.

Borg, E. 2004. *Minimal Semantics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Clark, H. H. and Wilkes-Gibbs, D. 1986. "Referring as a Collaborative Process." *Cognition* **22**: 1–39.

Donnellan, K. S. 1970. "Proper Names and Identifying Descriptions." *In* D. Davidson & G. Harman (eds.), *Semantics of Natural Language*. Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1972, pp. 356–79.

——. 1974. "Speaking of Nothing." *The Philosophical Review* **83** (1): 3–31.

Evans, G. 1982. *The Varieties of Reference*. edited by J. McDowell. London: Oxford University Press.

Grice, H. P. 1957. "Meaning." *The Philosophical Review* **66**: 377-88; reprinted in Grice 1989, pp. 213–23.

——. 1975. "Logic and Conversation." *In* P. Cole and J. L. Morgan (eds.), *Syntax and Semantics*, vol. 3, New York: Academic Press; reprinted in Grice 1989, pp. 22–40.

——. 1989. *Studies in the Way of Words*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

McDowell, J. 1986. "Singular Thought and the Extent of Inner Space." *In* P. Pettit & J. McDowell (eds.), *Subject, Thought, and Context*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 137–68; reprinted in J. McDowell, *Meaning, Knowledge and Reality*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998, pp. 228–59.

McGinn, C. 1981. "The Mechanism of Reference." *Synthese* **49**: 157–86; reprinted in C. McGinn, *Knowledge and Reality*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 197–221.

Neale, S. 1990. *Descriptions*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

Peacocke, C. 1983. *Sense and Content: Experience, Thought, and their Relations*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Perini-Santos, E. 2006. "Perceptual Modes of Presentation and the Communication of *De Re* Thoughts." *Facta Philosophica* **8** (1-2): 23–40.

Prior, A. N. 1971. *Objects of Thought.* edited by P. T. Geach & A. J. P. Kenny. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Recanati, F. 1993. *Direct Reference: from Language to Thought.* Oxford: Blackwell.

——. 2005. "Deixis and Anaphora." *In* Z. G. Szabó (ed.), *Semantics versus Pragmatics.* New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 286–316.

Russell, B. 1910. "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* **11**: 108–28.

——. 1912. *The Problems of Philosophy.* London: Oxford University Press.

Strawson, P. F. 1950. "On Referring." *Mind* **59**: 320–44; reprinted in Strawson 1971: 1–27.

——. 1959. *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics.* London: Routledge.

——. 1961. "Singular Terms and Predication." *The Journal of Philosophy* **68**: 393–411; reprinted in Strawson 1971: 53–74.

——. 1964. "Identifying Reference and Truth-Value." *Theoria* **30**: 96–118; reprinted in Strawson 1971: 75–95.

——. 1971. *Logico-Linguistic Papers.* London: Methuen and Co. Ltd.

Keywords

Eduardo Coutinho Lourenço de Lima
PPG Filosofia, UFMG, CAPES
Brazil
elourenco@gmail.com

Resumo

Neste artigo, discuto a maneira como o princípio do conhecimento identificador, apresentado por Strawson em 'Singular Terms and Predication' (1961) e 'Identifying Reference and Truth-Values' (1964), impõe condições restritivas à comunicação. Segundo o princípio, o uso de uma expressão referencial por um falante deve fazer com que o ouvinte recorra a um conhecimento identificador, caso o ouvinte pretenda compreender o que o falante diz. Mas o princípio também afirma que o falante deve estar atento aos estados epistêmicos de seu ouvinte ao empregar expressões referenciais. Por meio do contraste deste princípio com o Princípio de Russell (Evans 1982) e com o princípio das descrições

identificadoras (Donnellan 1970), procuro mostrar que o princípio do conhecimento identificador-uma condição da compreensão-somente faz sentido em uma situação de conversação. Concluo, assim, que a natureza cooperativa da comunicação (Grice 1975) e da referência (Clark and Wilkes-Gibbs 1986) também está presente na compreensão. Por fim, discuto e indico maneiras de melhorar partes da teoria de Strawson que me parecem insatisfatórias.

Palavras-chave

Conhecimento identificador, referência, compreensão, comunicação, Strawson, Evans.

Notes