LINGUISTIC TYPES VS. UTTERANCES VS. USES

1. Consider two identical twins Alice and Beth. In each case, Alice’s utterance is distinct from Beth’s utterance.
   Case 1: Alice and Beth simultaneously utter, “We are twins.”
   (a) The sentence Alice uttered = the sentence Beth uttered.
   (b) Alice’s use of ‘We are twins’ = Beth’s use of ‘We are twins’ (both have asserted the very same thing)

2. Case 2: Alice and Beth simultaneously utter, “I am Alice.”
   (a) The sentence Alice uttered = the sentence Beth uttered.
   (b) Alice’s use of the sentence ≠ Beth’s use. (Alice’s utterance is true and Beth’s is false)

3. Case 3: Alice utters, “I am Alice” and Beth utters, “You are Alice.”
   (a) Alice’s sentence ≠ Beth’s sentence.
   (b) Alice’s use = Beth’s use. (Strawson doesn’t talk about cases like this, so he may disagree, but this is how I understand his notion of use.)

4. Important to distinguish between utterances and assertions. Asserting something is one use that can be accomplished by uttering a sentence. You can also utter a sentence without making an assertion (e.g., try uttering ‘The car is in the garage’ as a question).

STRAWSON’S COMPLAINTS AGAINST RUSSELL

1. Russell confuses properties of a sentence / expression with properties of a use of that sentence / expression:
   “Meaning (in at least one important sense) is a function of the sentence or expression; mentioning and referring and truth or falsity, are functions of the use of the sentence or expression” (250).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>USE</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sentence</td>
<td>Has meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>expression</td>
<td>Has meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Has truth / falsity / (and sometimes neither)</td>
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   Slogan: “expressions don’t refer, speakers do!” Another: “sentences aren’t true, assertions are!”

   The source of Strawson’s insistence that “there are no logically proper names” (248). A logically proper name for a is an expression that refers to the individual a, but for Strawson expressions don’t refer.

   Less clear how the framework motivates Strawson’s “there are no descriptions (in [Russell’s] sense)” – since Russell doesn’t think that descriptions refer.

   Three sets of issues here:
(a) Strawson accuses Russell of thinking that what object an expression refers to is independent of the expression’s use. Is this accusation accurate? Maybe when it comes to definite descriptions (though couldn’t Russell concede that facts about the use partly determines reference?); clearly not for what Russell calls “egocentric” terms (see pp. 261–262 of his response to Strawson).

(b) Strawson thinks that truth / falsity belongs to assertions, Russell thinks truth / falsity belongs to sentence meanings (i.e., propositions). Weak vs. strong versions of thesis that “truth-or-falsity [is a characteristic] of a use of a sentence”:

i. Weak: propositions are primary bearers of truth / falsity, but sentences only express propositions on a particular occasion of use. But need Russell disagree? Russell obviously committed to the idea that often what proposition is expressed is at least sometimes determined by occasion of use.

ii. Strong: assertions are primary bearers of truth / falsity. Difficulties with this idea:
   A. Assertions are actions; actions are not typically true or false. What explains the truth of an assertion if not what is meant / said / expressed in the proposition is true?
   B. Russell’s quip from his response to Strawson: “I should like to see him apply his doctrine to such sentences as the following: ‘The square root of minus one is half the square root of minus four’” (261).

iii. Strawson suggests both ideas and suggests it’s just a matter of personal preference (“...we cannot talk of the sentence being true or false, but only of its being used to make a true or false assertion or (if this is preferred) to express a true or false proposition” (249)).

(c) Strawson and Russell mean different things by “meaning”. Strawson: “To give the meaning of an expression (in the sense in which I am using the word) is to give general directions for its use to refer to or mention particular objects or persons; to give the meaning of a sentence is to give general directions for its use in making true or false assertions” (251).

Russell’s conception of meaning: meaning of a sentence = proposition expressed by the sentence; meaning of a subsentential expression = contribution of that expression to the proposition expressed.

2. Russell: if there’s no unique \( F \), an assertion of ‘The \( F \) is \( G \)’ is false. But this is wrong; when there is no unique \( F \), such an assertion is neither true nor false.

(a) Strawson’s data (252):

i. If someone uttered ‘The king of France is wise’ we would respond neither by agreeing nor by disagreeing but by correcting her “misapprehension” that France has a king.

ii. The statement ‘There is no king of France’ seems not to contradict the statement ‘The king of France is wise’.

iii. A speaker’s uttering ‘The king of France is wise’ gives evidence that the speaker believes that there is a king of France, though not “in the way in which a man’s saying, ‘It’s raining,’ is evidence for his believing that it is raining” (252).

(b) Strawson’s explanation:

i. When uttering ‘The king of France is wise’ “we simply fail to say anything true or false.”

ii. This is a “spurious use” of the sentence (though see Martinich’s discussion of Strawson’s 1956 footnote on p. 211)

3. Stuff about context of utterance

(a) “In any normal use of [the sentence ‘The table is covered with books’], the expression ‘the table’ would be used to make a unique reference, i.e. to refer to some one table” (253). But on Russell’s account ‘the table’ has no denotation because there are many tables.

(b) Three responses on behalf of a Russellian:

i. Say that ‘the table’ is short for ‘the table in this room’ or something.

ii. Quantifier domain restriction.
Say that while the proposition expressed by ‘The table is covered with books’ is false, uttering that sentence can be a way of asserting, not that proposition, but the singular Russellian proposition composed of the table, the books, and the relation covering.

4. Strawson's polemic about logic and ordinary language

**Semantic Presupposition**

1. Strawson's claim about the truth-value-less-ness of an assertion of 'The king of France is wise' when there is no king of France suggests the following general principles:
   
   (a) If an assertion of 'The F is G' is true, then the F exists.
   
   (b) If an assertion of 'The F is G' is false, then the F exists.
   
   (See also p. 248: “[I]t does seem pretty clear, and I have no wish to dispute, that [Russell's account of the meaning of ‘The king of France is wise’] do describe circumstances which are at least necessary conditions of anyone making a true assertion by uttering the sentence ['The king of France is wise'].”) (“...the question of whether ['The king of France is wise'] is true or false simply did not arise., because there was no such person as the king of France” (252).)

2. The supposed phenomenon of such relations has been called **semantic presupposition**:

   sp An assertion of ‘P’ semantically presupposes that q iff an assertion of ‘P’ is true or false only if q.

3. Other examples of the supposed phenomenon:

   **Change of state verbs: stopped, started, etc.**
   
   P₁ Julie stopped / didn't stop beating her children.
   
   q₁ Julie has beaten her children.

   **Cleft constructions**
   
   P₂ It was / wasn't John who brought his mother.
   
   q₂ Someone brought his or her mother.

4. One problem with the idea: cancellability. In most cases there are contexts in which one of ‘P’ or ‘¬P’ can be used to make an apparently true assertion even though ¬q.

   “Who has stopped beating their children? Steve stopped, Mary didn't stop, and of course Julie doesn't have any children, so she didn't stop beating them.”

   “If someone brought his mother, then it was either John or Harry. But it wasn't John who brought his mother, and it wasn't Harry, either. So nobody brought his mother.”

   “The king of England came to the reception and so did the king of Norway, but France isn't a monarchy, so the king of France didn't come.”

5. Another problem: excluded middle. If ‘P’ semantically presupposes q, then ¬q implies that ‘P ∨ ¬P’ is not true. Most who deny bivalence at least retain excluded middle, but this appears not to be an option for those who think semantic presupposition is real.