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PROPER NAMES, DEFINITE DESCRIPTIONS
AND PROPOSITIONAL CONTENTS

Abstract

The aim of my work is to show that at least two kinds of arguments set up by Kripke against the Fregean semantics are grounded on a misinterpretation of the notion of sense. In *Name and Necessity*, the strength of the epistemic and semantic arguments comes from the identification of the notion of sense with the notion of linguistic meaning; from this identification it follows that proper names are *synonymous* with the definite descriptions expressing the senses determining their referents. Kripke is right to disprove this conclusion, but he is wrong to ascribe it to the Fregean semantics. According to Frege, senses are the matter of which propositional contents are constituted. To say that a proper name has a sense amounts to saying that the propositional contents, which a speaker may express by uttering sentences where the name occurs, contain the sense as a constitutive part. In other words, the Fregean thesis that linguistic expressions have a sense as well as a referent concerns the nature of propositional contents. It does not imply that proper names are synonymous with the definite descriptions expressing their senses; the thesis has nothing to do with the notion of synonymy; synonymy is a relation holding of types of expressions in virtue of their linguistic meanings and linguistic meanings are given by the rules that a competent speaker is supposed to know in order to use the expressions correctly. My claim is that a competent speaker is not supposed to grasp the senses of proper names to be able to use them correctly; as the notion of sense is independent from the notion of linguistic meaning, it is irrelevant to the holding of the synonymy relation between names and definite descriptions.