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An early version of this study on the linguistic turn in hermeneutic philosophy appeared in Spanish in 1993. Since that time, I have become aware of many issues that arise as a natural consequence of the original study. But the attempt to address these issues necessarily led beyond the framework of the initial project; accordingly, the remarks that follow are an attempt to show how a somewhat broader framework emerges from the original one.

My original project was an analysis of the characteristic traits and problems of the linguistic turn in the German tradition of the philosophy of language.\footnote{With the characterization of this tradition as “German” I mean to distinguish it from the other main tradition of the philosophy of language in this century, which I will call “Anglo-American.” Admittedly, such labeling of traditions is always problematic, given the possible discrepancy between the nationality of an author and the effective history (\textit{Wirkungsgeschichte}) of her work. The name “Anglo-American” may seem especially misleading for a tradition so deeply influenced by authors such as Frege, Carnap, and Wittgenstein. However, when we consider the effective history of the work of these thinkers, the label seems appropriate. At any rate, it appears less problematic than the attempt to subsume all of the diverse authors of a given tradition under the rubric of a single philosophical viewpoint. The difficulty of finding apt philosophical labels is especially clear in our own time, when the term “Anglo-American” has to include not only the analytic but also the postanalytic phase of this tradition. Equally so, the label “German” must cover not only the hermeneutic tradition (and its predeces-sors), but that of critical hermeneutics as well.} This turn can be regarded as having...
originated in the so-called Hamann-Herder-Humboldt tradition,\(^2\) which received further development and radicalization by Heidegger, and which through Gadamer has extended its influence to contemporary authors such as Apel and Habermas.

This German tradition exhibits specific features that distinguish it clearly from the Anglo-American philosophy of language. Perhaps its most important feature is the explicit attempt, found in all the authors of this tradition, to break with the assimilation of all functions of language to the cognitive function (language as a vehicle of knowledge) at the expense of its communicative function (language as a means of understanding). In other words, it is a central aim of this tradition to end what Humboldt terms the “primacy of logic over grammar,” a primacy that the authors in question trace to the very beginnings of Greek philosophy. The basic orientation of this tradition toward social and cultural phenomena rather than natural ones (toward the social rather than the natural sciences) explains this common motif among its authors. In keeping with this focus, the German tradition has always concentrated on the analysis of natural languages, and it has regarded these as *constitutive* of the relationship of human beings with the world at large. That is to say, this tradition’s philosophical interest in the analysis of language does not stem only from the crucial role played by language in our relationship with the objective world (by allowing us to have propositional knowledge of it). Rather, language is also held to be pivotal to our relation with the social world (which is essentially dependent on intersubjective communication), and even to our experience of our own subjective worlds (which are expressible only through linguistic articulation). In this way, language is considered in its multidimensional *world-disclosing* function.

However, the differences that appear obvious at first between the German and Anglo-American traditions cease to be so upon

\(^2\) As a solution to the difficulty mentioned in the previous footnote, Charles Taylor (1985) referred to this tradition of the philosophy of language as the “Hamann-Herder-Humboldt tradition,” a denomination that has now become standard.
closer analysis. Looking a bit more deeply, we find a clear convergence in their basic trends, and in the difficulties that begin to typify both traditions as a result of their own internal development: linguistic relativism, incommensurability, meaning holism, etc. Though such a convergence is far more obvious if the German tradition is compared with the Anglo-American philosophy of language since the 1950s (its postanalytic phase), this obviously could not have occurred had there not been a common basis for the linguistic turn in both traditions.

Although this book is directly concerned only with the analysis of the German tradition, it is crucial that we identify the common links between it and the approach of Anglo-American philosophy. This is important, first, owing to the systematic aim of my analysis, which is perhaps best expressed as an attempt to answer the following question: Are the difficulties mentioned in the last paragraph a consequence of the linguistic turn as such? That is, are they insurmountable problems that this turn alone has served to bring to light? Or do they result only from a peculiar way of executing the turn, so that they might be avoided by revising some previously unquestioned presuppositions? I am inclined to suspect the latter, again for reasons indebted to an Anglo-American trend that began in the 1970s—namely, the so-called theories of direct reference. This novel approach has convinced me that it is possible to avoid the consequences of an extreme linguistic relativism without renouncing the linguistic turn as such.

In short, the common basis of the two linguistic turns in the modern philosophy of language can be found in the way in which each was carried out by its main figure: Humboldt in the German tradition, and Frege in the Anglo-American. Both authors initiated their linguistic turns (it could scarcely have been otherwise) by introducing the distinction between meaning and reference. That

3. My preference for this denomination over the term “‘causal’ theories of reference” is not merely stylistic. As I will try to show in chapter 5, a defense of the crucial insights of these new theories of reference does not require or even imply the adoption of a causal explanation of reference, or that of a metaphysical-realist viewpoint in general.
is, they realized that the peculiarity of language, in contrast with any other system of signs, is that language makes it possible to refer to the same thing in different ways. But beyond this, both authors established this distinction in an identical manner, although this move is far from obvious: they generalized the meaning-reference distinction, viewing it as applicable to all linguistic signs (even proper names). In this way, they arrived at the general thesis that meaning determines reference.

But to accept this thesis as unrestrictedly valid leads to pernicious philosophical consequences. These become visible only when the claim that meaning determines reference, more or less harmless from a strictly semantic point of view, becomes burdened with epistemological tasks. Yet the linguistic turn as such seems to require such a burdening, given that language is no longer simply regarded as one object of study among others, but as the general paradigm for the solution of philosophical problems. In this context, the thesis that meaning determines reference is taken to imply that different linguistic expressions, with their different meanings, determine our (epistemic) access to their referents. That is, linguistic expressions are held to determine, if not what there is, at least what there can be for a linguistic community—or what such a community can say (i.e., believe) that there is. In this sense, the key function of language is held to lie in its world-disclosing capacity. For it is precisely this capacity that renders intelligible the attempt to reformulate all philosophical problems under the aegis of the philosophy of language. This also explains why the linguistic turn and the thesis that meaning determines reference seem to be one and the same. Or at least, it explains

4. Precisely because language, in contrast with other systems of signs, enables us not only to designate objects but also to classify them (i.e., to subsume different objects under the same term and the same objects under different terms), it performs a function of world-disclosure. That is, language allows us to have a general interpretation (and general propositional knowledge) of the world. To the extent that this function is what first makes language philosophically compelling, no linguistic turn can occur without the support of an account of this essential function of language.
why this was considered self-evident in both traditions for many years, and was only placed in question since the 1970s, in the Anglo-American context.

The pernicious consequences of the thesis that meaning determines reference become especially apparent once this thesis is combined with the fact of the plurality and contingency of natural languages and the worldviews peculiar to them (to use Humboldt’s phrase). For this combination necessarily poses serious problems for the possibility of objective knowledge of the world and of intersubjective communication across different languages. If “what there can be” in the world diverges completely for speakers of different languages, if they cannot talk about the same reality, how can they ever communicate? Worse yet, how can these speakers achieve any knowledge about reality?

However, the problems related to the thesis that meaning determines reference have not determined the development of both traditions in the same way. The essential difference is that Humboldt, and the German philosophy of language as a whole, were always interested in the analysis of natural languages, developed through contingent historical processes. By contrast, Frege worked in accordance with the Leibnizian ideal of a perfect language, a *characteristica universalis*. His views remained closely tied to this revisionary project of constructing an artificial language. For this reason, the problems implied in defending the thesis that meaning determines reference for natural languages do not yet appear with Frege in an explicit form. The parallel course of both traditions, especially as concerns the problems of linguistic relativism, became clear only at a later point: namely, when the Anglo-American tradition, in its postanalytic phase, abandoned the ideal of a perfect artificial language. In this way, it became sensitive to

5. Indeed, in his famous footnote about proper names in “Über Sinn und Bedeutung,” Frege anticipates the problems related to the thesis that meaning determines reference when it is applied to natural languages. But he sees these problems solely as further arguments for his revisionary project, i.e., for the need to avoid the ambiguities of natural languages through the construction of a perfect formal language for the sciences.
the insurmountable character of natural languages, and thereby to the problematic implications of meaning holism.

This underlying similarity between the two traditions encouraged me to pursue a specific line of research: I set out to examine whether the questioning of the thesis that meaning determines reference, a challenge initiated by the defenders of the theories of direct reference, could also prove fruitful elsewhere. In particular, I wondered whether such questioning could be useful for identifying and problematizing the source of the reification of language (the linguistic idealism) typical of the German tradition.

Certainly, the various attempts to develop a theory of direct reference have yet to provide a full account of reference in general. But their questioning of the thesis that meaning determines reference—the common denominator of all such efforts—already goes a long way toward undermining the relativist and incommensurabilist consequences resulting from the linguistic turn in both traditions. This questioning is carried out through an analysis of the peculiarity of designation as opposed to predication (i.e., world-disclosure). As I will try to show toward the end of the book, this analysis undercuts the alleged determinative and limiting character of natural languages, and it also helps us recognize the systematic way in which the use of language is inherently related to our capacity for cognitive learning. In turn, this insight allows us to identify the fallacy involved in epistemologizing the semantic distinction between meaning and reference. Such a procedure confuses the obvious fact that our descriptions of referents (via the meanings of the words we use) express our de facto beliefs about them with the purported fact that our descriptions thereby determine that to which they refer. Whereas the former supposition is owing to the trivial truth that “the limits of my knowledge are the limits of my world” (i.e., of how I believe the world to be), the latter gives rise to the myth that “the limits of my language are the limits of my world” (i.e., of the world that I can talk about). Insofar as the latter claim extends beyond the former, insofar as it is taken in the normative sense that we can only refer to that which corresponds to our beliefs, it is mistaken. The expressions
of a particular language with their varied meanings may determine our (epistemic) access to the referents. As pointed out before, they may even determine what a linguistic community can say that there is. But they cannot also determine what this community considers its beliefs to be about: they cannot determine what the linguistic community can refer to.

Precisely by virtue of its referential function, language enables us to transcend the limits of our beliefs by enabling us to refer to things independently of how we conceive of them. That is to say, it allows or even forces us to treat referents as logically independent of our particular ways of conceiving them. When we learn the referential use of linguistic expressions, we learn that the real referents of these expressions cannot be reduced to whatever happens to satisfy our descriptions. That this cannot be what we refer to, no matter how reasonable our knowledge may be, forces us to recognize that the descriptions of the referents that make up our alleged knowledge about them can be mistaken. Only in this way can speakers refer to the same things, even if they disagree about how these things ought to be described. Or rather, only in this way can they disagree and thereby learn from each other.

Language not only plays a crucial role in our interpretative access to the world, but has an equally pivotal role in our understanding of the world as logically independent of any particular way of conceiving it. By learning the referential use of language, we learn precisely about this independence. Thus the practice of referring involves the formal presupposition of a single objective world, a world about which our interpretations may differ. Without such a presupposition, as I will try to show, the entire practice of rational discussion and collective learning would utterly collapse.

However, the question that immediately arises is how to give an account of the referential function of language that is consistent with an account of its predicative function. Put differently, the challenge is to give an account of the realist intuitions highlighted by the linguistic function of designation (on which the epistemic intuitions regarding the objectivity of knowledge, fallibilism, etc.,