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Theory of Absolute Reference and Analytic Philosophy

All concepts, methods, and techniques of the philosophy of language arise from its conceptions of language. Conceptions of language have determined the character of the philosophy of language and the direction of its philosophical research. Various schools and currents within the philosophy of language differ from each other, mainly in the way they understand the referential character of the sign—that is, the relationship between the meaning of a word and its referential object (referent).

Analytic philosophy is the most significant branch of the philosophy of language. Its goal is to dispel philosophical questions by means of linguistic analysis. This “dispelling” position is built upon the theory of absolute reference.¹ According to this theory, referential signs should either correspond to a definite object (referent) in reality, or have a definite meaning.

The theory of absolute reference was first formed by the artificial language school. Their theory of language oriented to definite referents belongs to the extreme forms of the theory of absolute reference, and will be called the “theory of absolute referent.” The theory of absolute referent can be traced back to and has its utmost manifestation in Gottlob Frege (1892),² in Bertrand Russell’s theory of reference (1905), and in Ludwig Wittgenstein’s

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early theory of picture (1921). According to Wittgenstein, language signs describe the world much like a painter who draws a picture using lines, colors, and patterns. Referents of words correspond to concrete objects of the real world. A combination of words corresponds to a combination of real objects (Wittgenstein 1921). Thus, in Wittgenstein's extreme views, flexible and changing meanings of words lose their independence and eventually disappear. In its logical analysis of language, the artificial language school entirely inherited Wittgenstein's conceptions of language based on the theory of absolute referent.

The theory of absolute referent advocates the abolition of meaning or the use of a referent to replace it. The question of whether a proposition is meaningful or not, according to the theory, depends on whether the words constituting the proposition have definite referents, or whether the proposition itself has a definite referent. In these views, ontological propositions in traditional philosophy were considered "meaningless" due to their lack of referent, and they were rejected. However, it is difficult to satisfy the demand of always having a definite referent—not only in philosophy, but also in mathematics and experimental sciences. For example, imaginary numbers and the concept of "infinity" in mathematics do not have any concrete referents. Positions and momentum of particles within one concrete period of time in quantum mechanics do not have distinct referents, either. Therefore, it would not be possible to demand that all ontological propositions of traditional philosophy have definite referents. However, the theory of absolute referent dismisses many propositions of experiential sciences and mathematics, as well as a number of ontological propositions of traditional philosophy.

The renunciation of meaning proposed by the artificial language school is thus not conceivable, even in a precise artificial language. For this reason, Wittgenstein led his research in another direction. In the 1930s he began studies on rationalism of the ordinary language school, and wrote *Philosophical Investigations* (1953). At the same time the ideas of George Moore, who, at the beginning of the century, promoted studies of natural languages, received overall attention. The core question of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* was how to treat the indefinite nature of meaning. In order to make indefinite meanings of words definite, Wittgenstein renounced giving definitions to words. Instead, he argued that the meaning of a word is in its use. As an example, Wittgenstein quoted the word "five" from the expression "five apples": "[b]ut what is the meaning of the word 'five?'—No such thing was in question here, only how the word 'five' is used" (1953, p. 3). As for the relationship between the use of a word and the word's referent, Wittgenstein stated that since words with definite referents constitute only one small part of language, the use of words is their most basic meaning. The

purpose of restricting the meaning of a word to its use, and not to its definition, aims at finding a meaning that will be definite. Since word definitions cannot be objectively examined, it is practically impossible to make them precise. Therefore, different people often have a different understanding of the same word. Moreover, these various understandings often do not reflect many functions of the words. The use of words, on the other hand, can be objectively examined and commonly agreed upon. For example, it is rather difficult to give a linguistic definition of a verb. However, if we do it based on the linguistic function of verbs, the definition will be "a word that is used after an adverb." This definition can be proven exact on concrete language examples, and is very precise. The majority of philosophers belonging to the ordinary language school advocated a differentiation between referent and meaning. At the same time they acknowledged the significance of meaning in philosophical research. The meaning they spoke about was not a universal and abstract reality; rather, it was the use of words. The ordinary language school no longer limited the concept of "meaning" to that of "referent." Natural languages in their eyes were perfect. According to the ordinary language school, ontology went against language use and purposely diverged from it, creating many false propositions. For this reason, the ordinary language school considered creating accurate descriptions of natural languages as the main purpose of philosophical research. Hence, by giving an accurate description to epistemological words, expressions, and sentences (such as "thinking," "being," "matter," "monism," "dualism of body and mind," "the primer character of matter," or "being is prior to thinking") and, by clarifying their use and the subtle differences between them, it is possible to prove that the ontological propositions of traditional philosophy go against the theory of use proposed by the ordinary language school. Once this had been established, the propositions of traditional philosophy could be corrected. Therefore, Gilbert Ryle, John Austin, and other philosophers of the ordinary language school spent a lot of time and effort to give an accurate description of the use of words in natural languages.

However, not a single word or proposition described by any philosopher of the ordinary language school was totally accepted by other scholars. Moreover, not a single linguist of the school used all his philosophical terminology in accordance with his own descriptions. The straits of the ordinary language school were caused by their tacit agreement upon the conception of language based on the theory of absolute meaning (i.e., that the meaning of a word is always definite).

At the very same time that Wittgenstein and his friends from Cambridge and Oxford began to work on the idea that "the meaning of a word is its use in the language," a group of American descriptive linguists headed by

Leonard Bloomfield was engaged in an attempt to bring the meaning of a word to an observable scope. In order to refrain from the indefinite nature of meaning, Bloomfield advanced his theory of language based on behaviorism and physicalism. According to Bloomfield (1933), the meaning of a word is, for example, the following succession: When Janet wants an apple, she produces a string of sounds to Jack, Jack climbs up the tree, picks up an apple and gives it to Janet. Hence, the meaning of a word should be reduced to behavior and cannot be explained psychologically. Only this type of meaning is truly observable. This behaviorist conception of language had a striking similarity to Wittgenstein's explanation of the use of the word "five," although there is currently no proof that Wittgenstein's concept "the meaning of a word is its use in the language" was influenced by the appearance of Bloomfield's *Language*. However, from this similarity of views we can conclude that Wittgenstein's later philosophy still sought an observable, objectively examinable nature of meaning. This search is a connecting link between Wittgenstein's early and late philosophy and is also a link between the artificial and the ordinary language schools. Of course, in comparison with the artificial language school, the ordinary language school no longer advocated the absolute definiteness of meaning, and abandoned its requirement of having a definite referent for every word. However, it still demanded that meanings of words be definite, where the definiteness of meaning is understood as the definiteness of use. Hence, the theory of absolute meaning replaced, for the ordinary language school, the theory of absolute referent. However, views advocated by the ordinary language school still belong to the theory of absolute reference.

An accurate description of natural languages is possible, given that their word meanings are definite. Such a precise description can be done, for example, in the case of computer languages. In reality, however, meanings in natural languages are not always definite. This is not a shortcoming of natural languages, but a realization of their strong referring ability.

Language is a productive system, in which a limited number of words and grammar rules serve an unlimited use (Humboldt 1988; Chomsky 1957). It is not possible to give a complete and accurate description of the use of all words and grammar rules of a language. For example, a description of a word's meaning is understood in the ordinary language school as describing its use. Thus, it is understood as describing the distribution of the word in all possible language environments (i.e., in which sentences the word occurs). However, as language is inherently productive, one word can occur in an infinite number of groups of words and sentences, which makes it impossible to study this word in all language surroundings. If the meaning of a word is determined by noncomplete induction in accordance with some of its

distribution, this meaning will still be indefinite. Thus, an absolute and accurate description of language proposed by the ordinary language school is methodologically insufficiently documented. In fact, issues similar to those arising from the concept that “the meaning of a word is its use in the language” had already been exhaustively studied from a linguistic angle by the famous linguist Zellig Harris at the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s. In his works Harris analyzed grammatical meanings of words (i.e., their grammatical functions). In his understanding, the grammatical meaning of a word should be inferred from all linguistic surroundings of this word, which view is known as his famous “theory of distribution” (Harris 1951). Looking at the theory now, it is obvious that it cannot answer the following question: If the grammatical meaning of a word is determined by its linguistic surroundings, what determines the grammatical meanings of the words constituting these surroundings? For example, if we say that the grammatical meaning of a verb is in its ability to follow an adverb, what linguistic surroundings will determine the grammatical meanings of an adverb? The answer is: a verb. Thus, the explanation in this case is circular. The ordinary language school was likewise confronted with the same problem of circular reasoning.

The development from the theory of absolute referent in the artificial language school, to the theory of absolute meaning in the ordinary language school, is a significant conceptual turn in twentieth-century philosophy. Understanding of the relationship between language and the world in analytic philosophy likewise underwent considerable changes. However, the basic language concept of analytic philosophy remained the theory of absolute reference (i.e., the idea that a word’s referent is always definite). The artificial language school reduced the concept of definite reference to a definite referent, whereas the ordinary language school limited it to a definite meaning or a word’s use. As will be shown below, this is the main reason why the ordinary language school could not solve the problems faced by the artificial language school, and why attempts of analytic philosophy to reject metaphysics have been a failure for almost one hundred years.

Theories of Relative and Absolute Reference

The relationship between language and the world is not as simple as described in the theory of absolute reference. Language is a sign system that serves to represent human experience. Elements of experience can be of many kinds. They are independent, continuous, static, and dynamic. Since elements of experience are theoretically unlimited, while the rules and the number of words in a language are not, language represents the limitless by limited means. Therefore, the relations between words and their referents are

complex and heterogeneous. If we regard words as ways to assemble referents, we can divide relations between words and referents (in short, reference relations) into the following groups:

1. *Finite set*: The number of referents described by a word is limited. This set includes all kinds of singular and particular nouns (e.g., Wittgenstein, father, and son, Bao).
2. *Infinite set*: The number of referents described by a word is theoretically limitless or cannot be counted to precision. This set includes all kinds of general and abstract nouns (e.g., tree, stone).
3. *Empty set*: Words with no referents (e.g., God).
4. *Undefined set*: The referent of the word is indefinite (e.g., the celestial body most distant from the Earth).
5. *Fuzzy set*: The scope of referents for the word ranges from individual to individual. Consider, for example, the word “tall.” Different people will have different standards for what they understand by the expression “a tall man.” All adjectives belong to this category.

All natural (ordinary) languages of the world contain at least the five kinds of relations between words and referents (reference relations) described above. These relations are an important condition for organizing human experience in natural languages. The “finite set” is an essential condition for naming individual entities. The “infinite set” is the prerequisite for discussing experience on an abstract level, in the situation where the speaker is no longer in touch with the described element of experience. For example, if we give a name for every tree in the world and do not have a general term “tree,” we will burden our memory by these numerous names and will not be able to discuss any concrete trees that we have not seen. Thus, taking this “infinite set” as an example, we can say that meanings of ordinary nouns are not generalized from all possible referents, but are formed by analogy and metaphor for the whole set on the basis of our contact with a finite number of referents.³ The generalization on the basis of a limited number of elements presupposes the indefinite character of the set. The “empty” and the “indefinite” sets are an essential condition for discussing newly introduced ideas. Without these sets people would not be able to discuss new events. The most indefinite of all sets is the “fuzzy set.” Fuzziness is an essential condition for linking up differences in observers’ experience, and a key premise that allows them to coordinate their activities.

The five kinds of reference relations described above are also used in the language of science. For example, the use of the “finite” and “infinite” sets in the language of mathematics is self-evident. Referents for the meaning “imaginary numbers” belong to the “empty” set. All mathematical theorems still

waiting to be proved have a name. Referents for these names belong to the “indefinite” set. The formulation “the shortest distance between two points,” in geometry, makes use of the adjective “short” from the “fuzzy” set. In other words, the description of either human or scientific activities only with the help of a limited number of words and grammar constructions, and without the five types of reference relations listed above, would not be possible.

The definite referent sought by the artificial language school can appear only when both word meaning and referent belong to the finite set of reference relations. Although it seems that the category of “infinite” fits the theory of absolute referent, in reality it is not at all the case. As we have mentioned above, no researcher can see and describe every single tree in the world. Hence, the meaning of the word “tree” is indefinite. However, the “empty,” “indefinite,” and “fuzzy” sets were all rejected by the artificial language school—since, by rejecting meaning, the artificial language school also denied the essential function of language: to organize experience. Artificial languages developed by the school cannot appropriately describe all levels of human experience. Although the ordinary language school acknowledged the significance of meaning in language, it still sought for a meaning that would be absolute and precise. Thus, the ordinary language school reduced meaning to a word’s use and focused on its description, leaving apart complex and heterogeneous relations between words and referents. On the premise that the words and referents they denote are homogeneous, it reduced use to the definiteness of meaning. Therefore, its precise descriptions could not explain how natural languages can describe infinite experience by means of a limited amount of words and grammar rules. As long as there exists a heterogeneous relationship between words and the referents they denote, word meanings will never be absolute and precise.

The acknowledgment of the five types of relations between words and referents is a characteristic feature of conceptions of language built on the theory of relative reference and its basic difference from the theory of absolute reference. The existence of heterogeneous relations between words and referents is a premise of philosophical and scientific cognition. Philosophy is a dynamic activity extended in time. Its system of concepts is in the process of constant adjustment and advancement. Since many of its philosophical concepts are heterogeneous, this system is marked by high complexity. However, concepts such as “matter,” “spirit,” “being,” “infinite,” “finite,” “synthesis,” and “analysis” are essential for the feasibility of philosophical research, and require a transition from language signs conveying heterogeneous meanings to referents. Signs denoting heterogeneous meanings are likewise essential for science. When the terms “ether” and “electron” were introduced in physics in the early twentieth century, their referents were not yet determined. Nonetheless,

even without concrete referents these terms were “meaningful” in physics. Following the development of experiential methods, ethers were proved to be nonexistent. Electrons were detected, but could not be observed and described with precision (due to imprecise measuring techniques). The heterogeneous nature of word and phrase meanings determined their strong referential function. Many cultural processes would not be able to develop successfully without language signs having heterogeneous meanings.

Hence, there are no languages with absolute reference. Languages with relative reference can be divided into strong and weak. Languages with weak relative reference are a special case of languages with strong relative reference. For example, the language of mathematics is an example of a language with weak relative reference, whereas natural languages are languages with strong relative reference. Languages with weak relative reference are built on the basis of languages with strong relative reference. While natural languages can formulate the language of mathematics, the language of mathematics cannot create natural languages. The theory of absolute referent within the theory of absolute reference defines absolute languages with weak relative reference as consisting mostly of “finite” and “infinite” sets. The theory of absolute meaning within the theory of absolute reference could not predict that strong and weak relations between words and reference are heterogeneous. There is no natural language that can organize all levels of experience and, at the same time, retain the absolute and precise character of meaning.

In general, language and types of experience organized by language exist in the following relations:

- Language with weak relative reference Scientific activity
- Language with strong relative reference Human and scientific activities

Natural languages are systems with strong relative reference. They can organize concrete activities (e.g., mathematics) and abstract activities (e.g., physics and philosophy). We have to acknowledge that languages with strong relative reference are less suitable for the description of mathematics or physics than languages with weak relative reference. The language of mathematics is relatively close to languages with weak relative reference. It can account for physical activities, but cannot accurately account for philosophy and culture.

Theory of Relative Reference and Hermeneutics

Since relative reference is the basic property of natural language in organizing experience, it will always be reflected in philosophy. Thus, conceptions

of language based on the theory of relative reference can also be found outside analytic philosophy, namely in the rise of hermeneutics.

It is often believed that European hermeneutics, deconstruction, and Anglo-American analytic philosophy stand in opposition to each other, and that hermeneutics and deconstruction are likewise diametric in their views. However, all of them are consistent in positing the relationship between language and philosophy as the focus of their studies. Although hermeneutics and deconstruction are both considered as belonging to the philosophy of language, their views on the relationship between language and philosophy vary to a considerable extent. Contrary to conceptions of language based on absolute reference in analytic philosophy, the rise of hermeneutics followed a general acknowledgment of the theory of relative reference. Those adept at hermeneutics did not think that behind every meaning there is always a definite referent, although they never explicitly stated that hermeneutics were built upon conceptions of language based on the theory of relative reference. Hermeneutics took up a constructive attitude towards the relationship between language and philosophy. It advocated the idea that, by explaining natural languages, it would be able to answer ontological questions, opposing attempts to analyze natural languages to precision and to reject ontological questions. Two opposite kinds of language philosophy (analytic philosophy advocating analysis, and hermeneutics promoting explanation) were thus formed. The philosophy of language promoting explanation consisted of acknowledging a conception of language based on the theory of relative reference and of recognizing all languages, regardless of whether they have definite referents or not. Hence, the main objective of hermeneutics was to explain ontological questions in philosophy through language, and not to reject metaphysics, as was proclaimed in analytic philosophy.

Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer elaborated in their works exhaustively on the ontological relationship between language and philosophy. According to Heidegger, any scholar attempting to explain such a significant philosophical issue as "Sein" ("being") is restrained by "Vorsicht" (the previous views on it). This "Vorsicht" constitutes the scholar's preconceived ideas, background knowledge and premises. Since "Vorsicht" exists in language, an explanation of being is an explanation of language (strictly speaking, an explanation of the written language) (Heidegger 1927). In Heidegger's understanding, language is a philosophical substance. An ontological treatment of language in Heidegger's late philosophy was even more prominent. Philosophy was proclaimed as "thinking following the direction of language," instead of "thinking using language." Hence, being is the being of language. When language is being discussed, the reality behind it disappears. Gadamer regarded language as the best object of hermeneutics. Not a single branch of

science can exist independent of tradition. Since language is a sign system designed to record culture, the essence of tradition is concentrated in language. Language is, therefore, the way by which man enters the world (Gadamer 1976). Furthermore, man has no way other than language to enter the world. "This world is linguistic in nature," as Gadamer stated (1976, p. 351).

Since the philosophy of hermeneutics acknowledged the theory of relative reference, the ontology of arts—and all kinds of human sciences built on the basis of the heterogeneous nature of word meaning—received a linguistic foundation. Therefore, hermeneutics can be considered as another latent current of the Linguistic Turn in the philosophy of the twentieth century. Contrary to analytic philosophy, hermeneutics restored the place of ontology in philosophical studies, and considered it to be the art of language.

The theory of deconstruction by Jacques Derrida is often considered the opposite of hermeneutics. However, similar to hermeneutics, deconstruction was founded essentially on the theory of relative reference. For example, Derrida never advocated that all signs should have definite referents. On this point he was probably much more clear than other philosophers working in the field of hermeneutics. In many of his works Derrida criticized the structuralism of Saussure, as well as analytic philosophy in general. At the same time he supported Heidegger, in his idea that language is poeticized science. According to Derrida, the meaning of a word is realized through its opposition to other words. Meaning itself is not definite, and cannot be made definite in principle (Derrida 1967, 1973). This kind of reference fits exactly within the framework of the theory of relative reference. Thus, from the viewpoint of the theory of relative reference, deconstruction is primarily a kind of language philosophy with an explanatory character. Of course, it is an explanation based on deconstruction, an explanation in the wide sense of this word, an explanation that breaks any kind of relative stability or similarity.

The Linguistic Turn was manifested in both hermeneutics and deconstruction. However, hermeneutics and deconstruction did not conduct such a profound language analysis as was performed by analytic philosophy in the domains of semantics, grammar and language use. Their account of the relations between language and philosophy has an experiential character, often even bordering on fuzziness and self-contradiction. Thus, Paul Ricoeur considered the hermeneutics prior to Heidegger and Gadamer as the hermeneutics of cognition, since its position of language is still that of an instrument. Only the hermeneutics of Heidegger and Gadamer is of an ontological nature. In their works, explanation of language became the main task of philosophical study (Ricoeur 1981). However, it is worth noting that what Heidegger and Gadamer understood by language was, in reality, written

texts. The question of how these texts came into being was left unexplained. Language is here used as a kind of a cultural link that serves to explain the relationship between language and the world. Therefore, it is again an external explanation, in which language is considered an instrument; the structure of language is left out of the scope of research, whereas its objects and its recorded forms are placed in the focus of the study. After Ricoeur, the relationship between language and philosophy was regarded as latent and symbolic. Hence, the purpose of hermeneutics was reduced to explaining hidden or implied meanings. This is again a self-contained explanation that attempts to define language based on language signs themselves. The deconstruction of Derrida also attempts to explain philosophical questions on the basis of the relationship between language structure and the world. The philosophical research discussed above can be considered as the development of the Linguistic Turn by hermeneutics.

However, due to the lack of an underlying language theory and techniques of language analysis, internal explanations given by Ricoeur and Derrida did not contribute much to our understanding of language. Theories to enhance the development of the philosophy of language should first investigate the nature and inner structure of language, as was done by analytic philosophy, and only then inquire whether there is a relationship between the character and inner structure of language and that of the world, and what kind of relationship it is. Hence, language analysis should be one of the central purposes of the philosophy of language. In fact, since its very beginning analytic philosophy started its investigations from the analysis of language structure. The goal of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, by Wittgenstein, was exactly to find an interconnection between language, logic, and the world through language analysis. The *Philosophical Investigations*, on the other hand, had as its aim to find an interconnection between language use and forms of life through the analysis of language use.

The Linguistic Turn played an ever-prominent role in the philosophy of language of the late period. In works by American scholars such as Willard Quine, Noam Chomsky, Jacob Kats, Roderick Chisholm, and John Searle, it is difficult to distinguish between linguistic and philosophical aspects of language-related issues. In England, works by Gilbert Ryle, John Austin, and Peter Strawson can already be considered as real linguistic research. On the other hand, analytic philosophy, which advocates conceptions of language based on the theory of absolute reference, has always avoided ontological questions. For this reason, the philosophy of language it developed was inevitably reduced to the playing down of philosophical issues. European hermeneutics recognized the importance of the theory of relative reference, but lacked attention to the analysis of the inner structure of language that was

a characteristic of Anglo-American analytic philosophy. Therefore, their explanations of language are to a great extent arbitrary. Since scholars in the domain of hermeneutics and deconstruction were not linguists and, contrary to analytic philosophers, never sought contact with or help from linguists, they could never resolve the question of the inner relationship between language and philosophy, even though they might have been close to it. They used the theory of relative reference as a premise for their studies, but never understood its meaning. In his later works Heidegger over-emphasized the arbitrariness of meaning and denied the importance of referent. He created the theory of empty referent, which states that language has only word meaning and no corresponding referent. This development in hermeneutics led it to the total rejection of science and to the creation of the ontology of arts. Consider, for example, Derrida's famous statement that "there is nothing outside of the text" (1967, p. 158). In fact, words with no referents corresponding to them represent a subgroup of heterogeneous relations between words and referents (i.e., the "empty set" of referents). The narrow and limited humanism in hermeneutics is probably responsible for the fact that many philosophers consider analytic philosophy, and not hermeneutics or deconstruction, as the origin of the Linguistic Turn. Although both schools of philosophy advanced the Linguistic Turn based on their relatively independent cultural backgrounds; only analytic philosophy proved to be thoroughgoing and self-conscious in studying relations between language and philosophy.

Both analysis and explanation have their strong and weak sides. Analytic philosophy, based on the theory of absolute reference, searches for an absolute and definite meaning and referent by means of language analysis; and, it advocates the "rejection of metaphysics." Hermeneutics, based on the theory of relative reference, pursues the relative character of meaning by means of language explanations. Since hermeneutics lacked a self-conscious analysis of the relationship between meaning and referent, and never understood that this relationship was heterogeneous, Heidegger and Gadamer denied the existence of any definite referent behind meaning in their later works—thus creating the narrow and limited ontology of arts.

Conclusion

According to Wittgenstein, the statement "at one o'clock in the afternoon" is exact enough for receiving a guest, but not precise enough for conducting a laboratory test. On the other hand, the statement "1:30 and 30 seconds P.M." is exact enough for performing a laboratory test, but not suitable for receiving a guest, since very few people can be so exact when receiving a guest. It

would be more appropriate to say that the difference between these statements represents two types of experience. I believe that analytic philosophy and hermeneutics should be united. In this way, the relationship between language and philosophy can be understood in its entirety, and the philosophy of language acquires explanatory strength. Philosophers of language of the later period, such as Richard Rorty (1979), adhered to the same opinion. This blending of analytic philosophy and hermeneutics is probably one of the most significant tasks of the philosophy of language in the twenty-first century. However, the blending would hardly be possible before we understand the conceptions of language in analytic philosophy and hermeneutics, and the conflicts between them. A starting point for unification is difficult to find, for which reason analytic philosophers of the later period wanted, but could not achieve, this blending of views.

The purpose of this paper has been to find common ground for the unification of analytic philosophy and hermeneutics. The concrete work of this unification should wait for a later time. However, we now realize that analytic philosophy and hermeneutics should be understood from the positions of the theory of relative reference. A sign with a relative referent can conceptualize and organize not only static and homogeneous cognitive activities, but also those that are dynamic and heterogeneous. This is exactly the point where analytic philosophy and hermeneutics can be brought together. This kind of the philosophy of language will combine explanations of ontological theories with serious analysis. At that time, we will be able to prove that the value of a philosophical proposition is not in whether it is definite or not, but in whether it can truly represent our experience. When the blending of analytic philosophy and hermeneutics is complete, the philosophy of language will be able to make a unified explanation of all types of experience and activities, including natural and social sciences, from the linguistic point of view.

Notes

1. The term “reference” used in this paper is borrowed from Ferdinand de Saussure’s “signified” (Saussure 1916). However, the term “signified” in Saussure’s works stands only for “concept” (or “meaning”). In this paper, the terms “reference” and “referent” are used separately. The term “reference” stands for both “meaning” and “referent,” since “referent” is a concept comparable to “meaning.”

2. See Frege (1892, pp. 25–50). “Sense” and “meaning” are not distinguished in this work by Frege. In order to keep the discussed concepts unified, I use the term “meaning” to replace the term “sense.”

3. In the past, philosophy, psychology, and linguistics did not pay much attention to analogy and metaphor. However, it appears that analogy and metaphor are a key link in the process of forming concepts, ideas, and in creating signs. Analogy and metaphor could be the basic cognitive abilities that distinguish human beings from animals.

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