

## MEANING AND USE

There is a certain conviction about linguistic meaning which is widely shared today. This conviction might be expressed as follows. Somehow the concept of the meaning of a linguistic expression is to be elucidated in terms of the use of that expression, in terms of the way it is employed by the users of the language. To wit :

. . . to know what an expression means is to know how it may and may not be employed . . .

Gilbert Ryle, "The Theory of Meaning", in  
*British Philosophy in the Mid-Century*, p. 255.

Elucidating the meaning of a word is explaining how the word is used.

Patrick Nowell-Smith, *Ethics*, p. 67.

The meaning of a word is simply the rules which govern its use, and to ask for its meaning is to ask for the rules.

J. L. Evans, "On Meaning and Verification",  
*Mind*, LXII, p. 9.

To give the meaning of an expression . . . 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.

P. F. Strawson, "On Referring", *Mind*,  
LIX, p. 327.

. . . to know the meaning of a sentence is to know how to use it, to know in what circumstances its use is correct or incorrect. . . . A sentence is meaningful if it has a use ; we know its meaning if we *know* its use.

G. J. Warnock, "Verification and the Use of  
Language", *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*,  
V, p. 318.

And this conviction is not only held in the abstract. In the past fifteen years or so it has often been put into practice by way of investigating the use of one or another fundamental term, and a great deal of philosophical illumination has come out of these enterprises.

But despite the wide currency of the general conviction, and despite the numerous and wide-ranging investigations that have gone on under its aegis, no one has made a serious attempt to say, explicitly and in detail, what is to be meant by 'use' in these contexts, i.e., what is and what is not to count as revealing the *use* of a term. And still less has any serious attempt been made to say just how meaning is to be analyzed in terms of

use, as so conceived. If we scrutinize attempts to spell out one or another feature of the use of a term, we shall find that a great many different sorts of facts about a term are mentioned. They include the conditions under which a sentence containing that word can or cannot be uttered, the circumstances which would make certain statements in which the word figures true or false, the sorts of sentential contexts into which the word can or cannot be inserted, the grammatical inflections of which it is or is not susceptible, the questions which can or cannot be asked concerning a particular application of the term, the responses which can or cannot appropriately be made to utterances in which it figures, the other expressions to which it is or is not equivalent, the sorts of performances which are typically carried out when the word (or a sentence containing the word) is uttered, the implications which sentences containing the word, or the utterance of such sentences, would have. And for each occurrence of such words as 'can' in the foregoing, we see a number of alternatives spread out before us—intelligibly, correctly, properly, appropriately—each of which raises a host of questions. It would be difficult to bring all such facts under a single rubric, and such incipient attempts as have been made are either patently inadequate or hopelessly sketchy or both. It does seem initially plausible to construe all this as the uncovering of various sorts of conditions for the *correct* use of the word in question, conditions having to do with either the linguistic or the extra-linguistic environment of the word. (Cf. the quotation from Warnock above.) And since one is correct or incorrect as he does or does not follow certain rules, this could equally well be put in terms of getting at the rules which govern the use of the word. But such a formulation is not of much use unless we do something to separate the sort of rules and the sort of correctness which is involved in use in this sense, from the sorts which are not. For it is only too obvious that many sorts of rules which govern linguistic activity have nothing to do with use in any sense of that term in which meaning could conceivably be a function of use. For example, many speakers recognize rules forbidding them to use certain racy or obscene words in certain circumstances, or rules forbidding them to use crude or vernacular locutions in certain social circles; and such rules could be said to define a certain mode of correctness. And yet the consideration of such rules does nothing to bring out the meaning of such words.

In this essay I want to make a beginning at elucidating a suitable sense for 'use' and indicating the way in which meaning is to be understood as a function of use in this sense. I think it may serve to clear the air somewhat if I first indicate some directions from which no help is to be expected. In view of the apparently widespread impression that when one says that meaning is a function of use he is using 'use' in a quite ordinary sense, it may repay us to examine the most prominent contexts in which 'use' is used in a relatively unproblematical and unpuzzling way in connection with linguistic expressions, in order to satisfy ourselves that none of them furnishes anything which will meet our present needs.

## I

First consider the fact that the phrase, 'the use of *x*', as it is ordinarily used, fails to identify anything which an expression *has*, or which two expressions could be said to have in common. Ordinarily we speak of the use of a word, as of anything else, in the course of saying something about the fact of its employment—when, where, how frequent, etc.

The use of 'presumably' is inappropriate at this point.

The use of 'whom' at the beginning of a sentence is gradually dying out.

The use of 'by crackey' is largely confined to rustics.

Compare :

The use of sedatives is not indicated in his case.

The use of the hand plough is dying out all over Europe.

The use of automobiles in Russia is mostly limited to important officials.

It is clear that in such contexts 'The use of *E*' fails to designate anything which *E* has, and which it would share with any expression which had the same meaning, but fail to share with any expression which had a different meaning. If I were to ask one who had uttered the second sentence in the first list : "What is this use of 'whom' which is dying out, and what other expressions have the same use ?", I would be missing the point of what he had said. In making that statement, he was not talking about something called 'the use of 'whom'', which could then be looked for in other surroundings. He was simply saying that people are using 'whom' at the beginning of a sentence less and less. Nor is the question, 'What is the use of *E*?' any more fruitful. I suppose that 'What is the use of 'sanguine'?' would mean, if anything, 'What is the point of using 'sanguine'?', just as 'What is the use of a typewriter?' would ordinarily be understood, if at all, as an awkward way of asking 'What is the point of having (using) a typewriter?'; and this does not help.

Let us now look at some contexts in which we talk of the *way* an expression is used, or of *how* it is used. And let us consider what counts as a way of using an expression. Look at the adverbs we use to qualify 'A used *E*'.

A used 'Communist' effectively.

A used 'Yes sir' very insolently.

A uses 'Presumably' frequently.

Clearly none of these ways has an important bearing on meaning. The fact that two words are both used frequently, effectively, or insolently does nothing to show that they have the same meaning. Looking at the corresponding question, 'How is *E* used?', we might take anything which could serve as an answer to be a specification of a way of using *E*. It seems that such a question is normally concerned with the grammatical function of *E*. 'How is 'albeit' used?' 'As a conjunction.' 'How is 'ce' used?' 'With forms of 'être' under certain conditions.' Thus we could reasonably call 'as a conjunction', 'as a transitive verb', etc., ways of using expressions

But this won't do. Two words can both be used as a conjunction, or as a transitive verb, without having the same meaning.

We also speak of 'what E is used for', 'the use to which E is put', or 'the job E is used to perform'. But how do we specify what a word is used to do? It seems that the only cases in which we ordinarily make such specifications are of a rather special sort.

'And' is used to conjoin expressions of the same rank.

'Amen' is used to close a prayer.

'Ugh' is used to express disgust.

These are all cases in which it is impossible to teach someone the word by saying what it means, either because there is no approximately equivalent expression in the language ('and'), or because the exhibition of that expression would not be very helpful. (We might say "'Amen' means *so be it*", but this would be misleading at best; for it would give no hint as to the special circumstances in which 'Amen' is appropriately used.)

## II

From this survey I draw the conclusion that in non-technical talk about using words we are most unlikely to discover a sense of 'use' which is even a plausible candidate for a fundamental rôle in semantics. And if so, a technical sense will have to be constructed. If we consider some of the arguments which have led, or might lead, people to embrace the use-analysis, they might contain some clue to a sense of 'use' which one could use in carrying out the analysis. I shall consider three such arguments.

(1) "Since the meaning of a word is not a function of the physical properties of the word, and since a given pattern of sounds can have different meanings in different language-communities, or in the same language-community at different times, the meaning of a word must somehow be a function of the activity of language users, of what they do in their employments of the word." This argument may well lead us to suppose that meaning is a function of use in some sense, but in itself it will not help us to pin down that sense.

(2) "Specifications of meaning are commonly provided when we want to teach someone how to use the expression whose meaning we are specifying. Teaching someone how to use an expression is the native soil from which talk about meaning has grown. It is not, of course, the only sort of context in which one says what the meaning of a word is; there are also examinations, crossword puzzles, and many others. But it is the primary occasion for saying what a word means, and I would suppose that the other occasions are somehow derivative from it." Now this does strongly suggest that in telling someone what a word means we are putting him in a position to be able to use it, hence that knowing what it means is being able to use it, and hence that the meaning of the word is a function of how it is used. But all this, I fear, goes on the assumption that we already have an adequate

understanding of what is involved in knowing how to use a word. I do not see how we could derive such an understanding from these considerations.

(3) "Ultimately a meaning-statement (a statement as to what a linguistic expression means) is to be tested by determining what people do in their employment of the expression in question. For in saying what the meaning of an expression is, what we do is not to designate some entity which could be called the meaning of the expression, but rather to exhibit another expression which has some sort of equivalence with the first.<sup>1</sup>

For example :

'Procrastinate' means *put things off*.<sup>2</sup>

'Prognosis' means *forecast of the course and termination of a disease*.

'Redundant' means *superfluous*.

'Notwithstanding' means *in spite of*.

If this is granted, the next question obviously is : what sort of equivalence must two expressions have in order that one can be thus exhibited in specifying the meaning of the other ?<sup>3</sup> It seems plausible to say that it is equivalence in the way they are used that is crucial, for reasons similar to those put forward in the first argument. And this suggests that a meaning statement is to be tested by examining people's employment of the expressions in question, to determine whether they are employed in the same way."

From this line of thought we can at least derive a suggestion as to how meaning is related to use, whatever use might turn out to be. We can sum up what has just been said in the following formula.

'x' means y (the meaning of 'x' is y) = df. 'x' and 'y' have the same use.

From this formula alone we get no help in trying to decide what meaning we should attach to 'use'. However, if we could make explicit just what we would look for if we set out to determine whether two expressions are used in the same way, that might give us a clue as to a proper interpretation for 'use'.

<sup>1</sup>Arguments in support of this thesis are put forward in my essay, "The Quest for Meanings", *Mind*, Vol. LXXII, No. 285 (Jan. 1963).

<sup>2</sup>I should say something in explanation of my notation. I italicize what follows 'means' in order to indicate that there is something special about this occurrence of the expression. This is clear from the fact that we are neither using 'put things off', e.g., in the ordinary way (it is not functioning as a verb), nor are we referring to it in a way that would be marked by enclosing it in quotes. (This latter point can be seen by noting that we could not expand the sentence into : 'Procrastinate' means the phrase, 'put things off'.) This type of occurrence, which I more or less arbitrarily call 'exhibiting', I take to be unique ; and I believe that the only way to say what it is is to give the sort of elucidation of meaning-statements towards which I am working in this essay.

<sup>3</sup>Having the same meaning' or 'synonymous' seem to me to be naturally employed wherever, as in the foregoing, I would speak of 'having the sort of equivalence which enables one to be exhibited in specifying the meaning of the other'. However, one must be careful not to expect more from these phrases than they are intended to express. In using them I am not presupposing that I have specified, or can specify, something called 'a meaning' which they have in common. I shall freely avail myself of these phrases, but only as convenient and intuitively plausible abbreviations for the more cumbersome phrase.

Consider the statement, ‘ ‘Procrastinate’ means *put things off* ’. I can test this statement, at least for my speech, as follows.<sup>4</sup> I review cases in which I would say ‘You’re always procrastinating’, and determine whether I would use the sentence ‘You’re always putting things off’ to make just the same complaint. I think of cases in which I would say ‘Please don’t put things off so much’ and determine whether I would use the sentence ‘Please don’t procrastinate so much’ to make the same plea. I consider cases in which I say ‘Is he still procrastinating all the time?’ and I determine whether I would use the sentence ‘Is he still putting things off all the time?’ to ask the same question. And so on.

This suggests that a meaning-statement of the form, ‘ ‘x’ means *y* ’ is to be tested by determining whether ‘x’ and ‘y’ can be substituted for each other in a wide variety of sentences without, in each case, changing the job(s) which the sentence is used to do, or, more precisely, without changing the suitability or potentiality of the sentence for performing whatever job(s) it was used to perform before the alteration. And since the “suitability” or “potentiality” of a sentence for the performance of a certain linguistic act is ultimately a function of the dispositions of the members of the community, a still more exact formulation would be this. The meaning-statement is justified to the extent that when ‘x’ is substituted for ‘y’ in a wide variety of sentences, and *vice versa*, the dispositions of members of the linguistic community with respect to employing sentences for the performance of linguistic actions is, in each case, roughly the same for the sentence produced by the alteration as for the sentence which was altered.

This in turn suggests the following way of conceiving use. First of all we shift our initial focus of attention from word-sized units to sentences. Even apart from the above considerations this is not an implausible move. The jobs which one might speak of using words to do, such as referring, denoting, and conjoining, have the status of incomplete aspects of actions, rather than of actions in their own right. One cannot, after bursting into a room, simply refer, denote, or conjoin, and then hastily depart. Referring or denoting is something one does in the course of performing a larger action-unit, such as making a request, admission, or prediction. It is therefore natural that we should begin the treatment of use with units the employment of each of which is sufficiently isolable to be treated as a complete action. I think it will be discovered that the smallest linguistic actions which are isolable in the concrete are all normally performed with the use

<sup>4</sup>For the present I am limiting myself to investigations of the meaning the investigator himself attaches to expressions, or the way the investigator himself uses expressions. This is not different in principle from what would happen in an investigation of the way other speakers use the expressions, but the initial description of the latter would be very much more complicated unless the checks were very rough indeed. I feel justified in allowing myself this simplification because I am bringing in testing procedures at this point for their suggestive value only. Of course, ultimately we should have to consider how statements of meaning and use, as we shall have analyzed these terms, stand with respect to the possibility of inter-subjective testing.

of sentences. (Of course, we have to take into account the fact that any linguistic element can function, for the nonce, as a sentence-surrogate, as in one-word answers to questions, e.g., 'John' in answer to 'Who was it that called?'.)

Having decided to begin with sentences, we can then define the notion of the use of a sentence as follows. ('s' and 't' will be used as sentence variables.)

The use of 's' = df. The linguistic act for the performance of which 's' is uttered.<sup>5</sup>

Thus the use of 'Please pass the salt' is to request someone to pass some salt to the speaker; the use of 'My battery is dead' is to tell someone that the speaker's battery is out of operation; the use of 'How wonderful' is to express enthusiasm; and so on. Then if we recall the general formula relating meaning to use,

IA. 'x' means *y* = df. 'x' and 'y' have the same use.

we can expand this for sentences, in terms of the above definition of the use of a sentence, as follows.

IB. 's' means *t* = df. 's' and 't' are uttered for the performance of the same linguistic act.

For example, 'A haint caint haint a haint' means *it is impossible for one supernatural spirit to inhabit another supernatural spirit*. This is to say that the sentences 'A haint caint haint a haint' and 'It is impossible for one supernatural spirit to inhabit another supernatural spirit' have the same use in the sense that they are employed to make the same assertion.

Some writers on this subject object to speaking of the meaning of a sentence.<sup>6</sup> They point out that sentences are not dictionary items, that one does not learn a new language sentence by sentence, etc. I think they are being over-scrupulous. One can understand the infrequency of talk about the meaning of sentences simply in terms of the fact that it is much more economical to present the semantics of a language in terms of word-sized units with their meanings, plus rules for combining them into sentences. And if this is the explanation, there is neither need nor justification for denying that talk about the meaning of a sentence makes sense on those, admittedly rare, occasions when it comes up. Incidentally, the example given above is taken from one such occasion. A friend was playing for me a record of some Kentucky mountain ballads in which the sentence 'A haint caint haint a haint' occurred, and my friend asked whether I knew what *that* meant. However, anyone who finds such talk distasteful can simply ignore the definition of sentential meaning. Nothing that is said about the meaning of words depends on it. (Although the discussion of word-

<sup>5</sup>This formulation, and those on the next few pages, are vastly over-simplified by the pretence that each expression has only one use and only one meaning. This pretence has been adopted in order to enable us to concentrate on other problems first and will be dropped in due course.

<sup>6</sup>See, e.g., Gilbert Ryle, "Use, Usage and Meaning", *Ar. Soc. Suppl.* Vol. XXXV (1961).

meaning does depend on the notion of a sentence being used to perform a certain linguistic act.)

Focusing back down on words and other sentence-components<sup>7</sup> and continuing to follow the lead of the testing procedures outlined earlier, we can define having the same use for such units as follows, (using 'u' and 'v' as variables for sentence-components) :

'u' has the same use as 'v' = df. 'u' and 'v' can be substituted for each other in sentences without changing the linguistic act potentials of each of those sentences.

Substituting into the initial meaning-use formula, we get

IC. 'u' means *v* = df. 'u' and 'v' can be substituted for each other in sentences without changing the linguistic act potentials of each of those sentences.

### III

I must pause at this point to consider two objections to these formulations, the consideration of which will reveal important aspects of our subject-matter. First, it is possible for you to tell me that two expressions have the same use (or the same meaning) without thereby telling me what either of them means. For example, you, as a native speaker of Japanese, might tell me that two expressions in that language have the same use, without telling me what either of them means. Similarly I could know, at least on authority, that two expressions have the same use without knowing what either of them means. But then something is wrong with our formula, according to which to say that 'u' and 'v' have the same use *is* to say what 'u' means.

I do not believe that this objection is as formidable as it appears at first sight, although in order to meet it we shall have to sacrifice the classic simplicity of the analysis. It seems to me that when one tells someone what an expression means, he is in effect telling him that two expressions have the same use ; but he uses the meaning formulation only when he supposes that his hearer already knows how to use the second expression. Thus the meaning statement is subject to a presupposition which distinguishes it from the statement of equivalence of use. The ultimate reason for the presence of this presupposition is the fact, noted earlier, that specifications of meaning have the primary function of teaching someone how to use an expression. Pointing out that 'u' has the same use as 'v' will do nothing to help you master the use of 'u' unless you already know how to use 'v'. Once we make this complication explicit the difficulty vanishes. Rather than explicitly indicating this kind of presupposition on each occasion, I shall simply serve notice once for all that in each case the meaning-statement is to be taken to be equivalent to the use-statement only when the use-statement is taken with the presupposition that the hearer already knows how to use the second expression.

<sup>7</sup>For the sake of brevity I shall use the term 'word' alone, even where I intend what I am saying to apply to all meaningful sentence-components. I believe it will be clear where the addition is to be understood.



The second difficulty could be stated as follows. The sentences 'I have just been to dinner at the White House' and 'Heisenberg just asked me to write a preface to his latest book' would both be employed to impress the hearer; but one certainly would not say that they have the same meaning, nor would one exhibit one of these sentences in order to say what the other means. Nor would the fact that 'call' can be substituted for 'dinner' in the first sentence without altering its suitability for being used to impress the hearer, do anything to show that 'call' and 'dinner' have, even in part, the same meaning.

In reflecting on this difficulty one comes to recognize a fundamental distinction between two sorts of acts one could be said to perform by uttering a sentence (for the performance of which one could utter a sentence), one of which is usable in our definitions, the other of which is not. Consider the following lists.

## I.

report  
announce  
predict  
admit  
opine  
ask  
reprimand  
request  
suggest  
order  
propose  
express  
congratulate  
promise  
thank  
exhort

## II.

bring x to learn that . . .  
persuade  
deceive  
encourage  
irritate  
frighten  
amuse  
get x to do . . .  
inspire  
impress  
distract  
get x to think about . . .  
relieve tension  
embarrass  
attract attention  
bore

I am going to use the term 'illocutionary' to denote acts of the sort we have in the first list and 'perlocutionary' to denote acts of the sort we have in the second list. I borrow these terms from the late Professor John Austin's William James lectures, *How To Do Things With Words*. Austin chose these terms because he thought of the first sort of act as done *in* uttering a sentence, the second sort as done *by* uttering a sentence. Although I put less stock in this prepositional test than did Austin (who, indeed, put it forward only with many qualifications), the terms seem felicitous. However, it will be clear to readers of Austin that my distinction does not precisely parallel his; and it would be unfortunate if my terminological appropriation should lead anyone mistakenly to hold Austin responsible for my analysis.

These two classes of acts seem to me to differ in the following important ways.

(1) It is a necessary condition for the performance of a perlocutionary, but not an illocutionary, act, that the utterance have had a certain sort of result. I cannot be said to have brought you to learn something, to have moved you, frightened you, or irritated you, unless as a result of my utterance you have acquired some knowledge, have had certain feelings aroused, etc. But I could be said to have made a report, request, or admission, asked a question or offered congratulations, no matter what resulted from my utterance. I have still asked a question whether you answer it or not, or for that matter, whether or not you pay any attention to me or understand me.<sup>8</sup>

(2) A perlocutionary, but not an illocutionary, act can be performed without the use of language, or any other conventional device. I can bring you to learn that my battery is dead by manoeuvring you into trying to start the car yourself, and I can get you to pass the salt by simply looking around for it. But there is no way in which I can *report* that my battery is dead, or *request* you to pass the salt, without uttering a sentence or using some other conventional device, e.g., waving a flag according to a pre-arranged signal. This difference is closely connected with the first. It is because a perlocutionary act is logically dependent on the production of a state of affairs which is identifiable apart from the movements which produced it, that I can be said to perform that action whenever I do anything which results in that state of affairs. The result provides a sufficient distinguishing mark.

(3) Illocutionary acts are more fundamental than perlocutionary acts in the means-end hierarchy. I can request you to pass the salt in order to get you to pass the salt, or in order to irritate, distract, or amuse you. But I could hardly amuse you in order to request you to pass the salt, or get you to know that my battery is dead in order to report that my battery is dead.

A convenient rule-of-thumb (but no more than a rule-of-thumb) is provided by the fact that an illocutionary, but not a perlocutionary, act can in general be performed by the use of a sentence which includes a specification of the action performed. I can admit doing *x* by saying 'I admit doing *x*'. I can propose that we go to the concert by saying 'I propose that we go to the concert'. But perlocutionary acts resist this mould. In uttering 'You're fine, how am I?', I may be amusing you; but I couldn't do the same thing by saying 'I amuse you that you're fine, how am I?'. If you were a fastidious and proud cook I might irritate you by saying 'Please pass the salt', but I could not do the *same* thing (of a perlocutionary sort) by saying 'I irritate you to please pass the salt'. (Though this last utterance *might* irritate you in some way.)

<sup>8</sup>It may be an arguable point whether I can be said to have made a request of you if you have failed to understand what I said. But even if I am wrong in supposing that I can, there would still remain a sharp difference between the two sorts of actions with respect to effects. For even if that particular sort of effect is necessary for illocutionaries, it is a general blanket requirement that does nothing to distinguish between one illocutionary and another. Whereas a perlocutionary act is made the particular act it is by the condition that a certain sort of result has occurred. It is the specific character of the result that distinguishes it from other perlocutionary acts.

The examples given earlier should make it clear that sameness of meaning cannot hang on sameness of perlocutionary act. On the other hand, I can find no cases in which sameness of meaning does not hang on sameness of illocutionary act. I therefore propose that the term 'linguistic act' in our definitions be restricted to illocutionary acts.

The notion of an illocutionary act is left in a rough state in this essay. It is obvious that if the sameness of the illocutionary act performed on two occasions, or the sameness of the illocutionary act usually performed by two sentences, is such a crucial notion in my account, it is of the first importance that I have reliable criteria of identity for illocutionary acts. And to develop these I should have to go beyond the largely negative characterization so far provided and determine the sorts of conditions which must be satisfied if one is to be truly said to have performed a certain illocutionary act. Of all the loose threads left dangling in this essay, this one has the highest priority.

#### IV

Having attained a measure of clarity concerning the sorts of acts involved, we can now turn to the task of correcting the oversimplification imposed on our definitions by the fiction that each expression has only one meaning and only one use. This is quite often not the case. 'Can you reach the salt?' sometimes means *please pass the salt*, sometimes *are you able to reach as far as the salt?*, and perhaps sometimes *I challenge you to try to reach as far as the salt*. 'Sound' has a great many different meanings—*audible phenomenon*, *in good condition*, *long stretch of water*, *measure the depth of*, etc. Moreover, this unrealistic note in our definienda is reflected in the definiens. It is rarely the case that two sentences are used alike in every context, or that two expressions can be substituted for each other in every sentence without altering linguistic act potentials. Thus corresponding to the above case of sentence-multivocality we have the fact that 'Can you reach the salt?' and 'Please pass the salt' are used to perform the same linguistic act in many contexts but not in all. And corresponding to the case of word-multivocality cited above, we have the fact that 'sound' and 'audible phenomenon' can be substituted for each other in some sentential contexts without changing linguistic act potentials, e.g., in 'Did you hear that . . .?', but not in others, e.g., in 'I've been sailing on the . . .'.

Thus if our account is not to be largely irrelevant to the facts, we must provide definition-schemas for kinds of meaning-statements which reflect the fact of multivocality. First, note that we often say, loosely, 'u' means *v* where, although there are other meanings, this is the chief or most prominent one. I suggest that we take care of this sort of case as follows.

IIA. The chief meaning of 'x' is  $y = \text{df. 'x'}$  and 'y' usually have the same use.

The expanded version for sentences would run :

IIB. The chief meaning of 's' is  $t = \text{df. 's'}$  and 't' are usually uttered in performing the same linguistic act.

And the expanded version for words would run :

IIC. The chief meaning of 'u' is  $v = \text{df. 'u'}$  and 'v' can be substituted for each other in most sentences without changing the linguistic act potentials of each sentence.

I am afraid that the terms 'most sentences' and 'usually', which occur in these definitions, promise more than they can provide. They can be given no mathematical interpretation, not even one as unspecific as 'over half'. Since we have no classification of contexts of utterance, or even any way of determining whether we are confronted with the same context on two different occasions, we cannot begin to say how many distinguishable contexts there are, and hence no sense can be attached to talk of any proportion of contexts. As for 'most sentences', no limit can be put on the number of sentence-types in a language, or even on the number of sentence-types in which a given word occurs; and so again there is no place for talk about a certain proportion of the total. (I take it to be clear that it would not do to understand 'most sentences' to mean *most sentence tokens which have actually occurred*; for this would make the results far too heavily influenced by the accidents of what has and has not happened to have been said. The same could be said for a similar proposal in the case of contexts.) We might understand 'most sentences' to mean *over half the sentence-types which have actually been employed*; but then we should have to weigh these types in terms of the frequency with which tokens of each of them occurs before we should be within hailing distance of what is needed. And the matter is further complicated by the fact that the prominence of a certain use is affected by factors other than the frequency of its occurrence, e.g., by how early in the course of learning the language it is generally acquired, or how important the topics are in respect to which it occurs. The most that can be said on this point is that the vagueness of the analysans nicely matches that of the analysandum.

This untidiness may well lead us to give up trying to introduce further refinements into the analysis of the notion of the chief meaning, and to concentrate instead on the notion of *a* meaning of an expression. In the light of the fact of multivocality this notion would seem to be the most fundamental one. *The* meaning of a univocal expression could be viewed as a limiting case, and talk of the chief meaning of a multivocal expression as a rough approximation which is good enough for certain working purposes. And with respect to the notion of *a* meaning it might seem that we could dispense with attempts to get at a suitable sense of 'most', and simply say that all that is required for it to be the case that a meaning of 'u' is  $v$  is that 'u' and 'v' sometimes have the same use. But unfortunately this will not do because of the fact that in specifying a meaning of 'u' we want to exhibit another expression with which the use in question is clearly connected. If our other expression, 'v', only exceptionally had this use,

we would not clearly identify it by exhibiting 'v'. It would not quite do to say, 'A meaning of 'manage' is *run*'; even though it is true that 'manage' and 'run' sometimes have the same use. Hence we have to introduce the more stringent requirement that the use which 'x' and 'y' have in common is a use which 'y' usually has. Thus :

IIIA. A meaning of 'x' is  $y = \text{df.}$  'x' sometimes has the use which 'y' usually has.

Expanded for sentences this would read :

IIIB. A meaning of 's' is  $t = \text{df.}$  's' is sometimes used to perform the linguistic act which 't' is usually used to perform.

And expanded for words it would read :

IIIC. A meaning of 'u' is  $v = \text{df.}$  In most sentences in which 'v' occurs 'u' can be substituted for it without changing the linguistic act potential of the sentence.

In this last definition the requirement that we choose a 'y' which usually has the meaning we wish to specify for 'x' is reflected in the specification of most of the sentences in which 'y' occurs. To say that 'u' sometimes, but not necessarily usually, has the use which 'v' usually has, is to say that 'u' can be substituted for 'v' in most 'v'-containing sentences, but not necessarily *vice versa*.

To say that 'x' has different meanings is to say that what is meant by 'x' on some occasions will differ from what is meant by 'x' on other occasions ; in other words, it is to say that what the speaker means by 'x' on one occasion differs from what he meant by 'x' on another occasion. To round off the account I will suggest a pattern of analysis for such phrases.

IVA. What A (the speaker) meant by 'x' on O (a particular occasion) was  $y$  (What was meant by 'x' on O was  $y$ ) =  $\text{df.}$  'y' usually has the use which 'x' had on O.

Again we guarantee that the meaning-statement does bring out the meaning by requiring that 'y' usually have the use which is in question. This can be expanded for sentences as follows :

IVB. What A meant by 's' on O was  $t = \text{df.}$  The linguistic act which A performed on O by uttering 's' is the linguistic act which is usually performed by uttering 't'.

And for words the expanded version would be :

IVC. What A meant by 'u' on O was  $v = \text{df.}$  If we substitute 'v' for 'u' in the sentence which A uttered on O, the resulting sentence would usually be used to perform the linguistic act which A was performing on O.

For example, "When A said 'He was so mean to me', what she meant by 'mean' was *cruel*". On our account this becomes : "The sentence 'He was so cruel to me' would usually be used to make the complaint which A was making in uttering 'He was so mean to me'". Here the requirement that 'v' usually have the use to which we are trying to call attention cannot be reflected in an emphasis on substituting 'u' for 'v' rather than *vice*

*versa* ; for we are talking about a particular case in which ‘ u ’ rather than ‘ v ’ is being used, and so any substitution will have to be made into this context. Instead the requirement is reflected in the condition that the sentence resulting from the substitution of ‘ v ’ for ‘ u ’ be usually used to perform the act which is being performed on that occasion.

It seems that phrases like ‘ usually ’ and ‘ most sentences ’ are unavoidable in all these analyses. And so the chaotic state of these concepts is going to infect any meaning-talk. I shall shortly draw some morals from this fact, and other like facts.

## V

I now want to call attention to certain difficulties attaching to these definitions, which in various ways show the meaning idiom not to be completely adequate for the subject matter with which it is designed to deal.

(1) Consider the fact that multivocality is not enough to prevent a statement of the form ‘ ‘ u ’ and ‘ v ’ have the same use ’ from being wholly true. For it might be that even though ‘ u ’ has several different senses ‘ v ’ would have just the same range of senses, distributed over its occurrences in the same pattern. In that case it would be unqualifiedly true, despite the multivocality of ‘ u ’, to say that ‘ u ’ and ‘ v ’ could be substituted for each other in any sentence without altering the linguistic act potentialities of that sentence. And yet it would not clearly be correct in this case to say unqualifiedly that ‘ u ’ means *v*. It is not that this would be clearly incorrect ; it is rather that we would not know what meaning-statement to make. It would not seem quite right to say that ‘ u ’ has *v* as its only meaning, for that would seem to imply that ‘ u ’ has only one meaning. But on the other hand, it seems that nothing specific could be urged against that statement, for ‘ u ’ and ‘ v ’ are everywhere equivalent. The fact that meaning-talk is not forearmed against such a contingency suggests that underlying such talk there is an assumption that two expressions cannot be multivocal without diverging in their use at some point. And this assumption would seem to be justified, not only by the fact that it seems impossible to find a clear-cut example of this sort of thing, but also by the fact that multivocality is one important source of lack of synonymy. The fact that a given expression has a variety of uses makes it much more unlikely than it would have been otherwise that there should exist an exact synonym. The matching would have to be much more complex than it would if the expression were univocal. Hence I am not inclined to worry about the possibility of this kind of discrepancy in our definition.

(2) The multivocality of ‘ u ’ is no more a necessary than it is a sufficient condition of the failure of universal adequacy of the statement, ‘ ‘ u ’ and ‘ v ’ have the same use ’. And this fact provides some actual cases of discrepancy between statements of this form and corresponding statements of the form, ‘ ‘ u ’ means *v* ’. There are cases in which ‘ u ’ and ‘ v ’ are not everywhere intersubstitutable in the appropriate way, but where ‘ u ’ is not

multivocal and where we would not be prepared to deny that 'u' has *v* as its only meaning. For example, 'shiny' means *bright*'. There are sentences in which a substitution of 'shiny' for 'bright' will not leave linguistic act potentialities unchanged, e.g., 'He's a very bright student'. And yet it seems that we should unhesitatingly affirm that the only meaning of 'shiny' is *bright*. Note that in this case 'bright' is multivocal, and that the failures in substitutability can be traced to that fact. Moreover, the failures have to do only with the substitution of 'shiny' for 'bright', not the reverse. I am inclined to think that in any case in which substitutability fails even though 'u' is univocal these conditions will hold. But even so the fact remains that we would be prepared to make an unqualified meaning-statement in cases in which unrestricted substitution is not possible. Of course this difficulty could be handled very simply by modifying the definitions to make it require substitutability of 'u' for 'v' only in most cases. But I am not happy about this. Remember that meaning-statements are used primarily to help someone acquire mastery of the expression whose meaning is being given. That is, we find an expression, 'v', which, we suppose, he already knows how to use, and we tell him, in effect, to use 'u' in the same way. Now if in such cases we are interested, as it seems clear we are interested, both in teaching him to use 'u' correctly himself, and in teaching him to understand employments of 'u' by others, then for the first purpose we need to give him an expression he already knows how to use for which 'u' can be substituted, and for the second purpose we need to give him an expression he already understands which can be substituted for 'u'. And this means that the meaning-statement is a reliable device for the purposes for which it is intended only to the extent that unrestricted substitution in both directions is possible. Thus failures of substitutability in either direction should lead to a qualification of the meaning-statement. I think we can see why there is no modification when there are (minor) failures in substituting 'u' for 'v' only. Such failures indicate that there are uses of 'v' which 'u' does not have, but they do not necessarily indicate any plurality in the uses of 'u'. Therefore we do not want to say, on this basis, that *v* is only one of the meanings of 'u'. And this is the only qualification that is available, so long as we are restricted to the resources of ordinary meaning-talk. Here we seem to have a complication which the meaning idiom is incapable of expressing adequately.

(3) We have been talking as if whenever 'u' is substituted for 'v' in a sentence, the substitution either will or will not change the linguistic act potentials. But if we remember that any sentence can be used to perform more than one linguistic act, we will realize that a given substitution might conceivably alter the suitability of the sentence for performing some linguistic acts but not others. And this complicates matters. Perhaps in most cases the alteration is an all or nothing affair. But there are cases of the mixed sort. If, e.g., we substitute 'place where alcoholic drinks are served' for 'bar' in 'I was admitted to the bar', we will leave unaffected

the possibility that this sentence is used to report that one had been allowed to enter an establishment serving alcoholic beverages, but not the possibility that it is used to report that one has been granted the right to practice law. This complexity might be taken account of by modifying the definiens in each case to read "without *substantially* altering the linguistic act potentialities of the sentence in each case". Of course, there are various conceivable states of affairs in which this would not work. For example, it is conceivable, though it is not in fact the case, that in every sentence containing 'authentic', or in most such sentences, the substitution of 'genuine' for 'authentic' would alter at least one important linguistic act potential of the sentence, but leave at least one other important linguistic act potential unaffected. In that case it would not be true to say that in most sentences in which 'authentic' occurs, 'genuine' could be substituted for it without substantially altering the linguistic act potential of the sentence. And yet since a significant part of the linguistic act potential of each of these sentences would be unchanged by such a substitution, we might take this as indicating a significant overlap of meaning in the terms, and hence might want to say that one meaning of 'genuine' is *authentic*. I am not sure that this is a real possibility. But whether it is or not, it is noteworthy that here again we have certain complexities which cannot be adequately reflected in the meaning idiom.<sup>9</sup>

The general trend of these considerations (to which should be added the difficulties mentioned above concerning such terms as 'most' and 'usually' in the definitions) is to exhibit various respects in which talk about meaning, as it actually goes on, is vague, rough, and lacking in resources for reflecting all the significant distinctions within its subject-matter. It is clear that meaning-statements are dealing with sameness and difference of use among expressions, but it is also clear that they are dealing with this in a relatively unsubtle fashion. If we want analyses of meaning-statements which closely reflect their actual use, we are not going to get anything very fine-grained. If we want to talk in a more precise way about the facts that we are getting at in meaning-talk, the sameness of use idiom, as here developed, provides a more adequate instrument. In that idiom we can easily make such distinctions as that between failures of substitutability in the one direction or the other, and between the range of sentences in which substitution can be carried out and the extent to which substitution is possible in each of these sentences, distinctions which are obscured in the meaning idiom. We could then proceed to develop measures, along several

<sup>9</sup>It is maintained by some, e.g. by Paul Ziff in *Semantic Analysis*, Ithaca, N.Y., 1960, that there are cases in which at least rough equivalents of a word can be given, but in which it does not make sense to say that the word means so-and-so, e.g. 'tiger'. Ziff maintains that one would properly ask not 'What does 'tiger' mean?', but rather 'What is a tiger?'. The class of cases for which this claim is made seems roughly to coincide with the class of terms which are such that no necessary and sufficient conditions for the application of the term can be given. The most plausible examples are all substantives. I do not wish to either accept or reject this position, though it seems plausible. I merely wish to point out that if it is justified it indicates still another limitation on the meaning idiom.



different dimensions, of the extent to which two expressions have the same use.

Of course we could develop terms in the meaning idiom which would at least mark out segments of these dimensions and make that idiom more nearly adequate. But I doubt that the game is worth the candle. I feel that it is more fruitful to provide and refine analyses of meaning-statements just to the point at which it becomes clear what sort of claim is being made in meaning-statements, and then to pursue further refinements in the more supple use idiom. We should now be in a position to see that meaning-talk is a practically convenient approximation of the theoretically more fundamental statement in terms of sameness of use. In helping someone to learn to use an expression we find another which is approximately equivalent in use, and then, neglecting the various respects in which the two are or are not identical, and degrees of equivalence in each of these respects, we simply present the second expression as an equivalent, recognizing the complexity only to the extent of making some crude distinctions between *the* meaning, the chief meaning, and *a* meaning. It is clear why this is a useful procedure, but it is important to see that the very complexities which make the equivalence of use idiom unsuitable for everyday language learning make it vastly superior for semantic theory.

However, the sameness of use idiom has deficiencies of its own. For one thing, there are expressions for which, within the language, there are no synonyms, not even approximate ones, e.g., 'is' and 'and'. And this means that within the language we can neither say what they mean nor that they have the same use as some other expression. And yet we want to say that these words are meaningful or have a meaning; each of them plays an important and relatively consistent rôle in our talk, as much as other expressions which are not subject to this disability, e.g., 'albeit' or 'lid'. No doubt it is always, or almost always, possible to find some expression in another language which is approximately synonymous. But it seems odd that we should be forced to go outside the language to make explicit the function of these words. It is not that the other language, e.g., French, is richer in resources for talking about such matters. More generally, the presence or absence of an equivalent for a word in any given language seems to be an accident *vis-à-vis* the semantic status of that word; so that it should be possible to get at that semantic status without depending on such factors. This impression can be reinforced by considering the possibility of *inventing* an equivalent and, with luck, of getting it accepted into current use. In that case a meaning-statement, and a sameness of use statement, would then become possible without any significant change having occurred in the semantic status of the word in question.

Speaking of going outside the language to find an equivalent brings to mind an important defect of our analysis of 'same use' for words, viz., that it works only for intra-lingual equivalents. Remember that our analysis is in terms of substituting the two words for each other in a variety of

sentences. This operation can be carried out only when the two words belong to the same language. If we try substituting 'eau' for 'water' in 'Give me some water', nothing happens; we draw a blank.

Both of these deficiencies would be remedied by developing a way of *specifying* the use which a given word has. That would free us from any dependence on the fact that there happens to exist an approximate synonym. Presumably it would be possible to specify (in English) the use(s) of 'and' or 'is', or any other expression which we would be inclined to call meaningful. And we can bring in inter-lingual judgments of sameness of use by first separately specifying the use of each word and then basing assertions of (degrees of) equivalence of use on that. This indicates that for these reasons, as well as for many others, the next major step in the direction pointed out by this essay (after a thorough analysis of the notion of an illocutionary act) will be the development of a satisfactory way of identifying and describing the use(s) of a particular word. This is almost virgin territory. There are various terms in current use which might be thought to mark out large categories of such uses—'denote', 'connote', 'refer', 'qualify', 'conjoin', etc.; but although some, especially 'refer', have received a great deal of discussion, some of it quite subtle, virtually nothing has been done in the direction of developing a general method for identifying, classifying and interrelating uses as a basis for semantic theory. At this point it can only be said that the difficulty of the enterprise is matched by its importance.

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