

# FREGE'S REFERENTIAL DUALISM CONCERNING PROPER NAMES<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT:

In order to establish an adequate conceptual framework for the discussion of the referential mechanisms concerning Fregean proper names, it is argued that Frege held the view that definite descriptions in subject-position generate 'semantic prerequisites' and that such semantic prerequisites are in fact semantic presuppositions in a sense very similar to the one expounded by Strawson in "On Referring". In addition, it is argued that Frege's account of the referential mechanism involved by definite descriptions in subject-position is entirely different from the one involved by simple proper names, which do not involve semantic presuppositions, but only a 'semantic principle'. This entails that the Fregean 'proper names' actually play two distinct referential roles in language. Finally, some consequences of this interpretation are listed, as suggestions for further discussion within the renewed framework.

## I - INTRODUCTION

In his famous challenge to the Russellian Theory of Descriptions, Strawson seems to have revived a former Fregean concept of semantic presupposition. Although there are strong indications that Frege held a view that ultimately inspired Strawson, the issue has never been properly cleared up. As a result, the Fregean account of the referential mechanisms involved by the expressions he called proper names remained misunderstood so far. So, a return to the discussion of the relevant aspects of the Fregean semantics is needed. In order to accomplish this task, I shall take the following steps. First, I shall argue that Frege held the view that definite descriptions in subject-position generate what may be called 'semantic prerequisites'. Second, I shall show that such semantic prerequisites are in fact semantic presuppositions in a sense very similar to the one expounded by Strawson in "On Referring" (1950). Third, I shall argue that Frege's account of the referential mechanism involved by definite descriptions in subject-position entails that the expressions he calls proper names actually play two distinct referential roles in language. Fourth and finally, I shall consider some of the suggestions for further discussion that may be extracted from the reassessment of Frege's semantics. Although the

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purpose of this paper is mainly hermeneutic, the expectation is that it will contribute to a better understanding of the semantic puzzles involved.

## II - THE CONCEPT OF A 'SEMANTIC PREREQUISITE' IN FREGE

In this section, I shall analyze a particular semantic relation which is expounded in "On Sense and Reference". Consider the Fregean analysis of the sentence

(1) Whoever discovered the elliptic form of the planetary orbits died in misery.

According to Frege, it contains the clause

(2) Whoever discovered the elliptic form of the planetary orbits

which has a reference, that is, designates an object, only if a certain sentence is true (Frege 1892a: 69). The sentence the truth of which is a condition of (2)'s having a reference is:

(3) There was someone who discovered the elliptic form of the planetary orbits (id.).

Frege claims that the sense of (3) is not included in the sense of (1) (1892a: 69-70). In addition, the truth of (3) is a precondition not only for the subordinate clause (2) to have a reference, but also for sentence (1) to have a truth-value. These features define a semantic relation involving subordinate clauses, sentences containing these clauses and their Fregean references. I shall call it the Fregean relation of *semantic prerequisite*. In doing this, I am following Geach and Black's suggestion in their somewhat free translation of Frege's text<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> At this point, it is worth making a comparison of the German text and the translation involved. The German passage runs:

Nun haben die Sprachen den Mangel, dass in ihnen Ausdrücke mögliche sind, welche nach ihrer grammatischen Form bestimmt erscheinen, einen Gegenstand zu bezeichnen, diese ihre Bestimmung aber in besonderen Fällen nicht erreichen, weil das von der Wahrheit eines Satzes abhängt (Frege 1969: 55).

Geach and Black's translation runs:

Now languages have the fault of containing expressions which fail to designate an object (although their grammatical form seems to qualify them for that purpose) because the truth of some sentence is a *prerequisite* (Frege 1892a: 69; italics mine).

If the above interpretation is correct, the Fregean relation of semantic prerequisite may also be applied to the explanation of the referential task of definite descriptions in subject-position. True, in "On Sense and Reference", Frege does not deal explicitly with the semantic prerequisites generated by definite descriptions in subject-position. Instead, he analyses the prerequisites generated by noun clauses like (2); he then passes on to the prerequisites of adjectival, adverbial, and conditional clauses (1892a: 70-1). But the existence of the relationship of semantic prerequisite in the case of sentences containing definite descriptions in subject-position may be inferred from Frege's treatment of some of the above clauses.

First, consider the case of noun clauses. It may be shown that some noun clauses can be expressed by means of definite descriptions. Suppose the description

(4) The discoverer of the elliptic form of the planetary orbits

which may occupy the subject-position in the sentence

(5) The discoverer of the elliptic form of the planetary orbits died in misery .

In conformity with the pattern of the above analysis of (1), we may say that (5) has the semantic prerequisite

(6) There is a discoverer of the elliptic form of the planetary orbits.

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Now a more literal translation would run:

Now the languages have the fault that within them [languages] some expressions are possible which, according to their [the expressions'] grammatical form, determinately seem to designate an object, but they [the expressions] do not reach their determinateness in certain cases, for this depends on the truth of some sentence.

Of course, Geach and Black's translation is stylistically better than mine. But their improving the style of this particular passage involves an important remark. Although they seem to preserve the sense of Frege's thought in their translation, they introduce the term 'prerequisite' which is *not* in the German text. Now this suggests that Frege held the view that there is a semantic relation involved and that the relation may be expressed by means of a concept which might be called a 'semantic prerequisite'. This is not misleading only because *such a relation may in fact be spotted* in Frege's text. For this reason, I see no problem in adopting the term for defining the semantic relation involved.

On the basis of the above example, I feel at ease to suggest the point that there are noun clauses which have the form of definite descriptions such that, when they occupy the subject-position, they may generate sentences that have semantic prerequisites in the sense above defined.

Second, consider the case of adjectival clauses. Frege's analysis reveals they can be used to construct compound proper names, but in a peculiar way. Adjectival clauses function as grammatical adjectives, and for this reason they only form part of the noun clause; they yield a complete noun clause only when they are linked to another expression. Frege's example of an adjectival clause is

(7) which is smaller than 0 .

According to Frege, (7) cannot express a complete thought and have a reference by itself. In fact, its sense can only be part of a thought and its reference cannot be an independent object. But the clause can be part of the following compound proper name:

(8) the square root of 4 which is smaller than 0.

In some cases, with the help of a single adjective, one may construct an expression having the same reference as (8). For instance, in the adequate numerical system, (8) is equivalent to

(9) the negative square root of 4.

Now in his analysis of adjectival clauses, Frege makes an important and explicit qualification that applies to definite descriptions:

Adjective clauses also serve to construct compound proper names, though, unlike noun clauses, they are not sufficient by themselves for this purpose. These adjective clauses are to be regarded as equivalent to adjectives. Instead of 'the square root of 4 which is smaller than 0', one can also say 'the negative square root of 4'. *We have here the case of a compound proper name constructed from the expression with the help of the singular definite article. This is at any rate permissible if the concept applies to one and only one single object* (1892a: 70-1; italics mine).

Here, a definite description is taken as a compound proper name which is constructed with the help of the word 'the'. And Frege clearly states that, in the cases of both noun clauses and adjective clauses, the use of this word requires not only that the object referred to exists, but also that it be unique. The same connexion with proper names and with the requirement of existence and uniqueness is explicitly formulated in Frege's paper on "Negation":

The definite article 'the' in the expression the negation of the thought that 3 is greater than 5 shows that this expression is meant to designate a definite single thing. This single thing is in our case a thought. The definite article makes the whole expression into a singular name, a proxy for a proper name (Frege 1977: 50).

As a result, (6) should be more rigorously rendered as

(10) There is exactly one discoverer of the elliptic form of the planetary orbits.

We also know that the compound proper names (8) and (9) are definite descriptions. Although Frege does not offer examples of semantic presuppositions generated by them, this may be easily done. In the case of (8), for instance, consider the sentence

(11) the square root of 4 which is smaller than 0 is a real number.

If we adapt the Frege analysis of (4) to the case of (11), we shall find that (11) has the semantic prerequisite

(12) there is exactly one thing which is the square root of 4 which is smaller than 0.

If this is correct, the above interpretation reveals that adjectival clauses may be used to construct definite descriptions which generate semantic prerequisites when in subject-position<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> For reasons of space, I shall skip the analysis of conditional clauses. Anyway, the latter would be too complex and unnecessary for my needs, since the previous analysis of noun clauses and adjective clauses already reveals that definite descriptions in subject-position do in fact generate semantic prerequisites in Frege's view.

The claim that in Frege's view definite descriptions in subject-position generate semantic prerequisites is consistent with some of his hints concerning the features of definite descriptions in "On Sense and Reference". The first hint is that empty definite descriptions are expressions having a sense but no reference. As an example, he offers the description

(13) the least rapidly convergent series (1892a: 58).

He also offers some examples of empty definite descriptions outside the strict domain of mathematics, such as:

(14) the celestial body most distant from earth (1892a: 58),

and

(15) the will of the people (1892a: 70).

More precisely, Frege argues that (13) has a sense, but demonstrably has no reference (1892a: 58); that (14) has a sense, but hardly has a reference (id.); and that it is easy to establish that (15) has no generally accepted reference (1892a: 70). Now the relation of semantic prerequisite as defined in Frege's case requires that some expressions may have a sense but no reference. For when there is a prerequisite failure, that is, when the sentence being the semantic prerequisite is false, the sentence having the prerequisite must still have a sense, although it has no reference. And the way to obtain this is to construct the sentence in question by means of expressions which have a sense but no reference. >From the first Fregean hint, it is clear that empty definite descriptions belong to the class of expressions which can have a sense but no reference, thus being valid candidates for generating semantic prerequisites when in subject- position.

The second hint is the fact that Frege offers an example of an empty description in connexion with his discussion about the causes of the existence of semantic prerequisites generated by noun clauses (1892a: 70). After analyzing the case of noun clause (2) [Whoever discovered the elliptic form of the planetary orbits], Frege argues that the existence of expressions of this kind, that is, expressions

which have a reference only if a correlated sentence is true, arises from an imperfection of language. He then claims that a logically perfect language can avoid this by the stipulation that combinations of symbols that seem to stand for something but have no reference should stand for the number 0 (id.). In the discussion that follows, Frege offers the previously mentioned definite description (15) [The will of the people] as an example of such empty combinations of symbols (id.). Thus, once again we may infer that in Frege's view a definite description in subject-position generates semantic prerequisites.

So far, we know that Frege held a view that some expressions in subject-position generate semantic prerequisites and that definite descriptions are a subset of such expressions. In what follows, I shall argue that the Fregean semantic prerequisite is in fact a kind of semantic presupposition.

### III - SEMANTIC PREREQUISITE AND SEMANTIC PRESUPPOSITION

In this section, I shall argue that the Fregean semantic prerequisite above discussed is an instance of a general concept of semantic presupposition of which Strawson's account is also an instance.

This may be made with the help of an interesting 1975 paper entitled "Frege's Polymorphous Concept of Presupposition and its Role in a Theory of Meaning", in which Jay Atlas extracts not only one, but *three* different notions of presupposition from Frege's "On Sense and Reference". Among such notions, Atlas distinguishes a Fregean semantic presupposition which he characterizes as a relationship between thoughts (Atlas 1975: 29). The source of the concept is the following Fregean passage:

The sense of the sentence 'After Schleswig-Holstein was separated from Denmark, Prussia and Austria quarrelled' can also be rendered in the form 'After the separation of Schleswig-Holstein from Denmark, Prussia and Austria quarrelled'. In this version, it is surely sufficiently clear that the sense is not to be taken as having as a part the thought that Schleswig-Holstein was once separated from Denmark, but that this is the necessary presupposition in order for the expression after the separation of Schleswig-Holstein from Denmark to have any reference at all. To be sure, our sentence can also be interpreted as saying that Schleswig-Holstein was once separated from Denmark. We then have a case which is to be considered later. In order to understand the difference more clearly, let us project ourselves into the mind

of a Chinese who, having little knowledge of European history, believes it to be false that Schleswig-Holstein was ever separated from Denmark. He will take our sentence, in the first version, to be neither true nor false but will deny it to have any reference, on the ground of absence of reference for its subordinate clause. This clause would only apparently determine a time (Frege 1892a: 71; Atlas 1975: 30).

According to Atlas' reading of Frege, the above paragraph brings out Frege's semantic notion of presupposition (1975: 30). Atlas argues that the existence of a temporal reference for the adverbial clause

(16) After the separation of Schleswig-Holstein from Denmark

semantically presupposes

(17) Schleswig-Holstein was once separated from Denmark.

Atlas claims that the thought expressed by a sentence containing (16) will have a truth-value only if the presupposed thought expressed by (17) is true. And this is equivalent to the relation of semantic presupposition in the sense previously defined by Atlas: the thought 'P' semantically presupposes the thought 'Q' if and only if the truth of 'Q' is a necessary condition of 'P's having a truth-value (Atlas 1975: 29; 30).

As far as the relation of semantic presupposition is concerned, I think Atlas' reading of Frege is right. But in conformity with the purpose of my work I would add two important qualifications.

First, the Fregean relation of semantic presupposition spotted by Atlas is an instance of the following general concept of semantic presupposition, involving both the Fregean and the Strawsonian account. Let 'P' and 'Q' be variables standing for a pair of Fregean thoughts, or Strawsonian statements. Now it is clear that although Fregean thoughts and Strawsonian statements differ from each other, they all share the two following important properties: i) each corresponds to the objective contents of the assertion made by means of a declarative sentence; ii) each is assessable for truth-value. Thus, 'P' and 'Q' are variables related to the above common properties. In this case, we may say that 'P' semantically presupposes 'Q' if and only if: i) if 'P' is true, then 'Q' is also true; ii) if the negation

of 'P' is true, then 'Q' is also true; iii) whenever 'Q' is true, both 'P' and its negation have a truth-value; iv) whenever 'Q' is false, both 'P' and its negation are truth-valueless. The above relationship is clearly extracted from Strawson's account of the referential role played by definite descriptions in subject-position and generalized in a way such that it may be applied to the analysis of the Fregean account. It is worth remarking that, although the relationship is defined in terms of the 'if-then' connective, it does not involve any kind of entailment. As a matter of fact, semantic presupposition is here clearly distinguished from entailment<sup>5</sup>.

Now turn to Atlas relationship of semantic presupposition. Suppose two thoughts, say 'P' and 'Q'. If the truth of 'Q' is a necessary condition of 'P's having a truth-value, we may say that both 'P' and 'not P' semantically presuppose 'Q' in the sense of the above general concept. For if 'P' is true, then 'P' has a truth-value and this means 'Q' is true; if 'not P' is true, then 'P' is false, that is, has a truth-value and this means that 'Q' is true; the same holds if 'P' or its negation is false<sup>6</sup>. As a result, it seems reasonable to assume that 'P' semantically presupposes 'Q' in Atlas' reading if and only if: i) if 'P' is true or false, then 'Q' is true; ii) if 'not P' is false or true, then 'Q' is true; iii) if 'Q' is true, then 'P' will be either true or false and 'not P' will be either false or true; iv) if 'Q' is false, then neither 'P' nor its negation will have a truth-value. Therefore, I would claim that the relation spotted by Atlas in Frege is an instance of the general concept of semantic presupposition as defined above.

The second qualification to be made is the following. I would add to Atlas' reading the important fact that in Frege's view definite descriptions in subject-position may also be shown to generate semantic presuppositions in the sense above defined. This may be inferred from Frege's analysis of the referential role of subordinate clauses in "On Sense and Reference". I shall argue that, although Frege does not use the word 'presupposition' in his analysis of the referential role of subordinate clauses and adopts a different phrasing, the relation involved is equivalent to semantic presupposition.

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<sup>5</sup> Any definition of semantic presupposition in terms of entailment would inevitably run the risk of blurring the concepts involved, since they are usually understood as differing from each other. I owe this clarifying suggestion to Stanley Eveling (Un. of Edinburgh).

<sup>6</sup> Atlas correctly notes that in the analysis of the simple proper name 'Kepler' Frege puts forward his view that the presupposition of a sentence and of its negation is the same (Frege 1892a: 69; Atlas 1975: 71).

There is a striking similarity between the relation of semantic prerequisite in the case of thoughts expressed by sentences containing subordinate clauses and the relation of semantic presupposition in the case of thoughts expressed by sentences containing adverbial clauses. Consider, for example, sentences (5) [The discoverer of the elliptic form of the planetary orbits died in misery] and (10) [There is exactly one discoverer of the elliptic form of the planetary orbits]. In fact, both (5) and its negation entail (10) in the sense that the truth of (10) is a necessary condition of (5)'s having a truth-value; if (10) is true, then (5) and its negation have opposite truth-values; if (10) is false, then neither (5) nor its negation have a truth-value. This allows the conclusion that (5) semantically presupposes (10)<sup>7</sup>.

If this is correct, then Frege held the view that definite descriptions in subject-position generate semantic presuppositions. Besides, the relationship involved may be considered an instance of the more general concept of semantic presupposition as defined above. True, there are differences between the Fregean and the Strawsonian account. For example, Frege is asking a semantic question of which the answer may be extended in order to explain the referential role of definite descriptions in subject-position, whereas Strawson clearly asks a pragmatic question about the uniquely referring use of definite descriptions in subject-position; Frege obtains a semantic relation between thoughts, whereas Strawson obtains a relation between statements.

These differences notwithstanding, both accounts involve instances of the more general concept of semantic presupposition. For suppose we abstract from the above differences. In this case, although the motivating research question is different in each author and statements are different from thoughts, the relation obtained by Frege shares some properties with the relation obtained by Strawson. In fact, both relations: i) are semantic; ii) involve assessability for truth-value only in case of presuppositional success; iii) involve non-assessability for truth-value in case of presuppositional failure. If we go further, we may also claim that: i) both the Fregean thought (or, alternatively, the Strawsonian statement) and its negation have the same semantic presupposition; ii) if the presupposed Fregean

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<sup>7</sup> But this fact reveals at the same time an important difference concerning the nature of the presupposed thought in Frege's view. For in the case of adverbial clauses, the presupposed thought is a factual one, like, for example, 'Schleswig-Holstein was once separated from Denmark', whereas in the case of other subordinate clauses it is an existential one, like, for example, (6) [There is a discoverer of the elliptic form of the planetary orbits]. This difference suggests that the relation of

thought (or, alternatively, Strawsonian statement) is true, then the presupposing thought (or, alternatively, Strawsonian statement) and its negation have opposite truth-values; iii) if the presupposed Fregean thought (or, alternatively, Strawsonian statement) is false, both the presupposing thought (or, alternatively, Strawsonian statement) and its negation are not assessable for truth-value; iv) the sense of the presupposing Fregean thought (or, alternatively, Strawsonian statement) does not include the sense of the presupposed thought (or, alternatively, Strawsonian statement).

In addition, the Fregean presupposed thought, which is expressed by a uniquely existential sentence, seems to share an important property with the Strawsonian uniquely existential presupposed statement: it has no presuppositions at all. Suppose 'P' and 'Q' are Fregean thoughts such that 'P' is expressed by a sentence containing a definite description in subject-position, 'Q' is expressed by a uniquely existential sentence containing the same description, and 'P' semantically presupposes 'Q'. Although Frege does not deal explicitly with this subject, his treatment of noun clauses in "On Sense and Reference" suggests that 'Q' has no presuppositions. For it may be inferred from his account that noun clauses in subject-position have a reference only if a thought stating the existence and uniqueness of the object referred to by the noun clause is true (1892a: 69). Given that 'Q' is essentially bivalent, that is, 'Q' has a truth-value even though the description it contains is empty, it follows that 'Q' does not semantically presuppose itself and needs not to presuppose semantically any other thought.

If the above interpretation is correct, then Frege in fact holds a view of semantic presupposition which is not only an instance of the general concept, but also very close to Strawson's own view. Even the status of the Fregean presupposing "thought" when the presupposed one is false is ambiguous, in a striking analogy with the ambiguous status of the Strawsonian presupposing "statement" yielded by the use of a sentence containing an empty description in subject-position.

Once the above distinction is made and the Fregean semantic concept of presupposition is clearly characterized, we may now turn our attention to an important consequence that the adoption of such a concept brings to Frege's semantics. The consequence concerns the different ways the referential role may be played by the Fregean proper names. This will be discussed in the next section.

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semantic presupposition might involve unexpected individuating features. But Frege does not explicitly discuss this fact and I am only concerned with the case of presupposed existential thoughts.

#### IV - SEMANTIC PRESUPPOSITION AND THE SEMANTIC PRINCIPLE

According to my interpretation of Frege, definite descriptions are referring expressions which generate semantic presuppositions when in subject-position. But this view introduces an important consequence in the consideration of Frege's account.

In fact, the concept of semantic presupposition involves a distinction in the ways a Fregean proper name may refer. For Frege's concept of proper name includes not only simple proper names, but also compound ones, a subset of which comprehends definite descriptions. And only definite descriptions seem to have semantic presuppositions in the sense previously defined. Fregean simple proper names have a different semantic relationship with their denotations.

In Frege's view, a proper name is anything which is a sign for an object (1892b: 47). A proper name may be simple or compound (Frege 1892a: 69). Thus, several expressions, like definite descriptions or some subordinate clauses, may function as compound proper names, provided that they stand for an object. The usual proper names, like 'Kepler' or 'Sachse', are included in the category of simple proper names. Obviously, Frege expands the concept of proper name in a way such that it comprehends the whole class of referring expressions. This fact suggests that according to Frege proper names and definite descriptions basically function in the same way in our language, and that there is no significant difference between them. But this claim is to be tested by means of the application of Frege's concept of semantic presupposition to simple proper names.

According to the concept, the employment of, say, the name 'Kepler' in a sentence like

(18) Kepler died in misery

would semantically presuppose

(19) Kepler exists.

Now we may ask about the nature of (19). According to Frege, (19) would make sense only with some special qualifications.

On the one hand (19) is equivalent to

(20) There is Kepler,

which is neither true nor false, but merely a senseless utterance (Frege 1892b: 50). One might suspect that the correct formulation of (19) should be

(21) There is a man whose name is Kepler,

but Frege argues that although (21) has a sense, 'Kepler' does not any longer function as a name here. The word is now part of the predicate 'a man whose name is Kepler'. (21) has a sense because 'there is' and its equivalents are second level predicates, that is, they may be ascribed only to concepts (Frege 1891: 37-8). What is more, a word like 'Kepler' can never be a proper predicate, although it can form part of a genuine predicate (Frege 1892b: 44). The general result from this case is that it would be incorrect to say that the thought expressed by (18) semantically presupposes the thought expressed by (19) in the same sense as a thought containing a definite description in subject-position semantically presupposes a uniquely existential thought.

On the other hand, (19) makes sense only if it is understood as signifying the metalinguistic principle that the name 'Kepler' has a reference. This is stated by Frege when he analyzes the same problem as regards the name 'Sachse' in his "Dialogue with Pünjer on Existence":

"If Sachse exists is supposed to mean the word Sachse is not an empty sound, but designates something, then it is true that the condition Sachse exists must be satisfied. But this is not a new premise, but the presupposition of all our words - a presupposition which goes without saying" (Frege c. 1884: 60).

In the case of the name 'Kepler' and (19), one may infer from the above passage that (19) is a condition that must be satisfied if the name 'Kepler' is not an empty sound. (19) is not a new premise, but expresses the presupposition of all our words. Frege thinks that the presupposition goes without saying, and this might be interpreted in two ways: either it refers to the relationship between the name 'Kepler' and its denotation in abstraction from the speaker's beliefs or it expresses the speaker's beliefs. In the former case, the presupposition would be semantic; in the latter, it would be pragmatic. But given that Frege's account of language includes the appeal both to semantic and pragmatic presuppositions (Atlas 1975: 30), it would be perfectly consistent to assume that the presupposition which goes without saying has both a semantic and a pragmatic reading. The semantic reading would abstract from the speaker's beliefs and only involve the principle that a simple proper name must designate something if it is not an empty sound. In this sense, the semantic principle is not to be confounded with the pragmatic principle that the name 'Kepler' has a reference. For the pragmatic principle concerns *the speaker's belief* that there is exactly one object referred to by the name 'Kepler' when he sincerely uses the name in order to make an assertion; by contrast, the semantic principle concerns the relationship between the name Kepler and its denotation, in abstraction from the speaker's beliefs and contexts. Thus, the semantic presupposition of a simple proper name is in fact a kind of Fregean *semantic principle* governing the use of our words. The principle can only be metalinguistically expressed and is so evident that it usually goes without saying. Once again, the general result from this case is that it would be incorrect to say that (18) semantically presupposes (19) in the same sense as a thought containing a definite description in subject-position semantically presupposes a uniquely existential thought concerning the object referred to by the description.

As a result, simple proper names in subject-position do not seem to yield semantic presuppositions in the same way as definite descriptions do. And Frege's concept of 'proper name' involves an unexpected dualism in the referential function. In fact, his account entails that there are at least *two* kinds of proper name. First, there are proper names which function like definite descriptions in subject-position. These expressions generate semantic presuppositions which are expressed by thoughts asserting the existence and uniqueness of the object referred to by the description. Thus, a thought expressed by a sentence of the form

(22) The F is so-and-so

semantically presupposes the thought expressed by a sentence of the form

(23) There is one and only one F.

Second, there are proper names which function like the simple proper name 'Kepler' in subject-position. These expressions do not have semantic presuppositions in the same sense as definite descriptions do. For a sentence of the form

(24) a is so-and-so

in which a is a simple proper name does not semantically presuppose

(25) a exists.

As already mentioned, (25) is either senseless or expresses the metalinguistic principle that the name a has a reference. The metalinguistic principle may be taken as a semantic principle, but it is not equivalent to the uniquely existential thought presupposed by the definite description in subject-position.

Now the above interpretation clashes with Kripke's claim that in Frege's account simple proper names are abbreviated or disguised descriptions (Kripke 1980: 27 ff.; see too Curry 1982: 169-71). Kripke argues that, according to Frege, it is the definite description which gives the sense of the name (Kripke 1980: 27). Whenever we want to determinate the referent of the name, we provide a uniquely identifying description. Although the referents of some names may be determined ostensively, ordinary names refer to all sorts of people, like, for instance, Socrates, to whom we cannot possibly point (id.: 28). Besides, when we discover that two names have the same referent and express this by an identity statement, the only way to explain the meaning of such a statement is by means of the analysis in terms of descriptions concerning the names involved (id.: 28-9). Also, when we raise the question whether a name, say 'Plato', has a reference, we are not questioning whether a particular man existed. Once we

have got the thing, we know it existed. What we want to know is whether anything has the properties we associate with the name (id.: 29).

Dummett has already argued against Kripke on this issue (Dummett 1981a: 110 ff.). But now Dummett's argument may be reinforced by the consideration of the semantic presuppositions generated by the expressions involved. For although the referent of a simple proper name may be determined by a description having the same reference, a thought containing the simple proper name in subject-position is only committed to the semantic principle that the name has a reference, whereas a thought containing the description in subject-position semantically presupposes a uniquely existential thought. In other words, although 'the pupil of Plato' may sometimes successfully replace 'Aristotle', the sentence

(26) The pupil of Plato is a greek philosopher

semantically presupposes

(27) There is one and only one pupil of Plato,

whereas

(28) Aristotle is a greek philosopher

is only committed to the Fregean semantic principle which metalinguistically expresses the fact that the name 'Aristotle' designates something and *does not* semantically presuppose that there is exactly one Aristotle. Of course, one might object that (27) is equivalent to the semantic principle that the description 'the pupil of Plato' designates something. But the fact is that, in Frege's view, to the semantic principle concerning the description *there corresponds the sentence (27) at the linguistic level*, whereas to the semantic principle that the name 'Aristotle' has a denotation *there corresponds nothing at the linguistic level*. All the reasons given by Kripke are based on the fact that both the sense and the referent of a name are given by a definite description.

But according to Frege, the sense of a definite description, such as ‘the teacher of Alexander the Great’ is determinate, whereas the sense of the simple proper name ‘Aristotle’ is not (Frege 1892a: 58, footnote). The sense of ‘Aristotle was born in Stagira’ may be ‘the teacher of Alexander the Great was born in Stagira’, or ‘the pupil of Plato was born in Stagira’, or any other sentence of which the grammatical subject is a definite description referring to Aristotle. So long as the reference to Aristotle remains the same, such variations of sense may be tolerated. But they cannot occur in a perfect language (id.)<sup>8</sup>. Thus, the Fregean simple proper name is imperfect. It *has not* a determinate sense. Each appropriate description gives only one possible sense, among others, to the name. So, the determinate sense of the description is not equivalent to the indeterminate sense of the name, although it may be part of it. And the fact that we give the referent of the name by means of a description does not entail that the name and the description are semantically equivalent. We may well use an analysis in terms of descriptions in order to clarify proper names, but this does not make them semantically equivalent at all. As a matter of fact, my interpretation of Frege’s account shows that simple proper names and definite descriptions in subject-position are submitted to different semantic relationships. This means that they play different roles in language, and that simple proper names *cannot* be considered equivalent to concealed descriptions. Although both definite descriptions (compound proper names) and simple proper names belong to the same class of referring expressions, they must be different from each other in virtue of their different referential mechanisms. This may be considered a general result of Frege’s account on simple proper names and definite descriptions. As far as Russell’s account of ordinary proper names as concealed descriptions, Kripke’s claim may be right. But when it comes to Frege’s account, Kripke seems to have got the wrong path.

In brief, the Fregean explanation of the referring function of definite descriptions by means of the concept of semantic presupposition yields a twofold account of the way a Fregean proper name refers: if the proper name is compound, then it refers in a way such that it generates semantic presuppositions in subject-position; if the proper name is simple, then it refers in a way such that it is submitted to the semantic principle that the name has a reference. The semantic presupposition

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<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, Frege does not say how to obtain a simple proper name of which the sense is determinate. From this standpoint, the early Wittgenstein’s ‘simple signs’ and Russell’s ‘logically proper names’ may be seen as attempts to solve the Fregean difficulty.

generated by a compound proper name is an existential sentence that is expressed at the linguistic level. The semantic principle can only be expressed at the metalinguistic level.

An important conclusion to be drawn at this point is that both referring functions may coexist in the same system without yielding contradiction. True, Frege denounces the existence of the mechanism of semantic presuppositions generated by definite descriptions in subject-position as an imperfection of our language (1892a: 70). But by means of the procedure of only introducing a new sign as a proper name if it has been secured a reference, Frege is able to construct a logically perfect language in which definite descriptions that generate semantic presuppositions when in subject- position do coexist with simple proper names that are only submitted to the Fregean semantic principle. Although the relation of semantic presupposition may be ignored by the perfect language, it still exists and requires special stipulations in order to avoid the introduction of empty definite descriptions. The formal system in "Grundgesetze" illustrates the coexistence of the Fregean simple and compound proper names without yielding contradiction.

## V - FINAL REMARKS

If the above interpretation is correct, then both the Fregean and the Strawsonian account involve instances of a more general concept of semantic presupposition. This shows that Frege actually held a view on semantic presupposition that inspired Strawson's. What is more, we may also conclude that Frege's account concerning the explanation of the referential mechanisms involved by the class of expressions he called 'proper names' is dualistic. It is true that the semantic presuppositions generated by a subclass of Fregean compound proper names, that is, definite descriptions, stem from an imperfection of ordinary language and are to be avoided by means of special stipulations in a logically perfect language. And the stipulations are such that the relation of semantic presupposition reveals to be dispensable in the perfect language. It is also true that simple proper names reveal another imperfection of ordinary language: they do not have a determinate sense. As long as the reference remains constant, the variations of sense in simple proper names may be tolerated in ordinary language. But in a logically perfect language they cannot occur at all.

As already mentioned, the Fregean dualistic account reveals that the semantic presuppositions involved by compound proper names may coexist with the semantic principle involved by simple proper names without yielding any contradiction. This fact is rich in consequences to be explored further. For reasons of space, I shall only list some of them here. First, the dualistic account suggests that it would be possible to construct a language in which Russellian logically proper names (or Tractarian simple signs) may coexist with definite descriptions which generate semantic presuppositions (in the sense of the general concept above defined). Second, this would lead us to the striking conclusion that the Russell/Strawson dispute is undecidable at the purely semantic level. Third, that Davidson's theory of meaning would then have to face an unexpected ambiguity in establishing the truth-conditions of sentences involving definite descriptions in subject-position. The current paper is intended to offer initially an adequate conceptual framework for taking the mentioned further steps in this discussion<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Most of the work has already been done. See my papers "Why did the Russell/Strawson dispute last so long?" and "Tractarian primitive simple signs and semantic presuppositions", to be published later.

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