

Research Article
Araştırma Makalesi

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A Review From Denotation To Denoting

Abstract

Gray's Elegy is an argument towards meaning and denotation of denoting concepts. Denoting concepts occur in propositions and quantifier phrases occur in the sentences that express those propositions. Russell used this argument to distinguish meaning from denotation. The study will follow this argument comparing two other ideas raised by Makin and Pakaluk. The paper ends up discussing the meaning of a denoting phrase or a complex in a proposition which becomes *about* the denotation by a chain of objects and ideas. A formulation will be introduced for the proposal at the final step.

Keywords

Denotation, Gray's Elegy argument, concepts and meaning.

1. Introduction

The German philosopher and mathematician Gottlob Frege in his 1892 paper *Über Sinn und Bedeutung* (*On Sense and Reference*) claimed that sense and reference are two different aspects of the meaning. Roughly, a term's reference is the object it refers to and its sense is the way in which it refers to that object. A decade later another important study is presented by Russell in the *Principles of Mathematics* (PoM)(1903). He made an effort to make a distinction between the sense and reference by another technical term called propositions. A proposition refers to the "content" or meaning of declarative sentence.¹

Russell uses the word "proposition" at various periods in various meanings. The meaning in his theory can often be defined by proceeding from the context. But at the period under review, Russell considers proposition not as a linguistic formation, but as something for what a linguistic sign stands; such a sign is a declarative sentence. Russell means by a proposition's being "linguistic" that meaning is *about* words² but his concern in PoM or before is never with words and sentences, but with propositions and their constituents. Existing entities are constituents of propositions. The complex propositions contain terms³ as their constituents too (The term is what Russell understands by as all that may be object of thinking and that can be enumerated. There are two kinds of terms or objects: some of them have some place in space or time, but the other not.)

His solution in PoM on the problem of sense and reference and even on whether a concept can be a logical subject of proposition made recourse with the notions of *a denoting concept* and the *relation of denoting*. According to Russell, a "concept denotes when, if it occurs in a proposition [as an objective truth or falsehood], the proposition is not about the concept, but about a term connected in a certain peculiar way with the concept" (PoM, p. 53). "Term" is used simply to mean "thing" or "object," in the widest possible sense—everything, Russell says, is a term (see, e.g., *Principles*, 47). In his idea, 'a term is anything' is capable of being a logical subject in a proposition (PoM, p.44). That is, concepts and terms relate logically together. Concepts inherently and logically *denote* such terms (*Principles of mathematics*, p.54). In other words, in "Denoting", a concept may be connected with a term or combination of terms which it is not a relation between words and things but a relation between things of a particular kind (denoting concepts) and things in general.

The relation in a proposition is *about* things. If a proposition contains a denoting concept it is about the things which that concept denotes, and not about the denoting

¹ For more details see: King Jeffrey C., (2011) Structured Propositions, Available at: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/propositions-structured/>

² His statement that words are all "symbols which stand for something other than themselves" is not to be taken as a philosophical theory of meaning, and when Russell speaks of "the entities indicated by words" he is not using "indicate" as a technical term.

³ A Term is a word or phrase used to describe a thing or to express a concept, esp. in a particular kind of language or branch of study.

concept itself. In particular, denoting concepts occur in propositions in a way that quantifier phrases of denotation occur in the sentences that express those propositions. Denoting concepts, in other words, are what the quantifier phrases of natural language (such as ‘every’, ‘any’, ‘a’, ‘some’, and ‘the’) express or stand for. Due to the theory of denoting concepts, the constituent is the denoting concept. But "the present president of South Azerbaijan" (which is a concept, not a person) may well fail to denote anything. This is the challenging point of the idea when it is asked that if propositions such as "I need *the* book" and "*the* present president of South Azerbaijan" have the same denotation approach because of the same quantifiers.

2. Denoting and Meaning

Russell shows a significant change in his idea in his paper 1905, “On Denoting”.⁴ According to Russell's views before “On Denoting”, the meaningfulness of a sentence such as "the present president of South Azerbaijan is handsome" demanded that there be a present president of South Azerbaijan. The significance of OD, is that it reformed Russell's theory of meaning in such a way that he could accept the meaningfulness of the sentence "the present president of South Azerbaijan is handsome" without accepting that there is, in any sense, present president of South Azerbaijan.

In the other example, “the dome of the Goy Machid”⁵ the round squares do not necessarily imply that “the dome” in the expression correspond to an object which have existence (Hylton, 1993). For Russell, as it is mentioned before, a denoting phrase is a (singular) noun phrase beginning with what linguists call a *determiner*, like ‘a’, ‘every’, ‘some’, or ‘the’. A phrase is denoting only because of its form not its “content”. However, a denoting phrase need not denote anything in order to be a denoting phrase; it simply needs to have the form of a phrase that is denoting something. That is, a phrase can denote a definite object such as the “the dome of the Goy Machid” or it can denote ambiguously a country or building, which there is no a country or a building in particular but an undefined country or building.

Therefore, a denoting phrase needs to denote anything in order for the verbal expression of the proposition which involves it to have a meaning. In addition, Russell thinks that denoting is a fact that concerns logic. The logic, in his word, is because of the relation between the objects designated and expressed. According to him, it is the meaning but not the designated or expressed *names* of the objects which denotes the denotation (OMD, see pp.317-18).

The theory of descriptions is his solution to the problems caused by the interpretation of denoting phrases. Russell thinks that one can infer things about the nature of the world by examining the language that truthfully describes the world. He

⁴ A theory which has been called a “paradigm of philosophy”. See for more details: Frank P. Ramsey, *The Foundations of Mathematics and Other Logical Essays*, ed. R. B. Braithwaite (London: Kegan Paul, 1931), p. 263.

⁵ It is a (Azerbaijan) Turkish name. Blue or sky mosque is its translation. For more details see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blue_Mosque,_Tabriz

suggests that such definite descriptions as "the golden mountain", "the round square", "the country of South Azerbaijan" do, in fact, denote things that fit or satisfy them. In short, the theory of description, originated from Russell's, "On Denoting," (1905) is an attempt to consider the meaningfulness of sentences by expressions that does not necessarily charges to prosecute the existence of such entities.

3. Gray's Elegy Argument

Gray's Elegy is an argument offered for the problem of meaning and denotation of denoting concepts to show that PoM is incoherent. The argument is proposed additionally reasoning that PoM cannot provide an adequate account of non-uniquely denoting concepts. Due to the argument, if it is assumed that any grammatically correct denoting phrase can stand for an object then difficulties in the interpretation of denoting phrases could be found hitherto. Denoting is not the subject of denotation; instead a meaning is casted on the denoted phrase (Brogaard, 2006). For example, if there is a Meinong⁶ object for the phrase "the present president of South Azerbaijan" which still reveals no such governor, then we have to admit both that there is and there is not a present president of South Azerbaijan. Obviously, it shows obviously a contradiction. It is not a clear elaboration. Russell states this by proposing that it is relevant to admit self-contradiction.

On the contrary, as alluded before, Frege by a distinction between sense and reference (or in other words, a distinction between meaning and denotation) avoid self-contradiction. He shows that a denoting phrase's meaning is to be found in its constituent meanings, not its denotation. But Russell argues on Frege's idea in a way that a statement 'the present president of South Azerbaijan' is not about the meaning at all, but about the man himself. Therefore, it is a statement about a denotation not a meaning. Frege's distinction between a denoting phrase having both meaning and denotation led Russell to put forth the idea of Gray's Elegy. He mentions 'the first line of Gray's Elegy'⁷ as a subject in a proposition⁸ which is about the meaning of what is contained within the inverted commas. Russell used commas to distinguish meaning from denotation.

Let's consider the proposition 'the first line of Gray's Elegy states a proposition'. This is the denotation of denoting phrase. But "'the first line of Gray's Elegy" does not state a proposition which is about the meaning of what is contained in the inverted commas: the relation between these meaning and denotation is not just linguistic, but it is a logic relation. We can express it as the meaning denotes the denotation.

If we say 'the meaning of C' (C = 'the first line of the Gray's Elegy') then we have the denotation. For example, 'the meaning of the first line of Gray's Elegy' is the

⁶ Meinong holds that phrases such as 'the present king of France', 'the round square' stand for genuine objects.

⁷ A poem by Thomas Gray (26 December 1716 – 30 July 1771). Its first line is 'The curfew tolls the knell of parting day'.

⁸ The proposition would be something like " 'The first line of Gray's Elegy' is a concept"

same as ‘the meaning of ‘the curfew tolls the knell of parting day’. So to have the meaning rather than the denotation we ought to avoid saying ‘the meaning of the C’ and instead say ‘the meaning of the ‘C’’, which is the same as ‘C’. Similarly, ‘the denotation of C’ does not denote what we want. It only denotes what is denoted by the denotation we want. For example, the denotation of ‘C’ is the curfew tolls the knell of parting day.

The problem with speaking of the meaning of a denoting phrase or complex is that the moment the denoting complex is put into a proposition it becomes about the denotation. If the subject of a proposition is within inverted commas, then it becomes the meaning of the denotation, not the meaning of the proposition inverted into commas. This is the big puzzle of ‘the relation between C and ‘C’ that still remains mysterious.

4. Gray’s Elegy’s puzzle

Is there difference between the following phrases one without the inverted commas and the other using these commas?

- 1: the country of South Azerbaijan is a building not a denoting complex.
- 2: “the country of South Azerbaijan” is not a building, but a denoting complex.

In other words, how the concept of phrase would not be related to the proposition over which a meaning is denoted? To elaborate the problem, let’s use L1 to indicate the entity occurring in subject position in the proposition expressed below by 1 and L2 for the entity (whatever it maybe) in subject position in the proposition expressed by 2. As Russell says if we wish to speak of the concept, we can indicate the fact by italics or inverted commas. So L1, on the theory in question, is a meaning or denoting complex which denotes a particular object where L1 occurs in the subject position in the proposition expressed by (1). Noting that constituents of L1 are indicated by the individual words of the corresponding phrase; otherwise stated, when the phrase occurs without inverted commas we are talking about the object(s) (e.g. a single building) — depending on the sense in which the phrase is used.

The approach of Russell seems to give a sense to a denoted phrase by acquiring a direct understanding of the every constituent of the proposition inverted. However, it is not clear what we may mean by using the terms acquirability and apprehension of a proposition in terms of denotation. When the phrase occurs between inverted commas it is the denotation we are talking about. We are talking about an issue which is not only the object, for example the building, but also the meaning of it. Acquaintance with L1 or L2 interrelates with our attitudes with the reality and truth level of their constituents.

This is acceptable if we consider ‘denotation’ when is used to mean either the object(s) denoted or the referent. The Phrase (2) seems that expresses a proposition about L1. But what is L2? L2 may be a different entity than L1 or L1 cannot be one of the constituents of L2 (Makin, p.24). Pakaluk (p.41, 43) and Makin (p.26) agree that this is not the cardinal problem. Makin thinks that our problem is to check the relatedness of L1 and L2 (ibid). He (ibid, p.26) argues that it would not seem that L1 is a different entity than L2. Since if (1) and (2) are about distinct entities, what occurs in their respective subject positions must *be* distinct entities where as it is obviously known that

they are talking about an identical thing. By an identical thing, I mean that L1 and L2 both refer to a single entity as an (denoted) object and meaning.

Russell, then, talks about the relatedness by stating that “the meaning denotes the denotation”. It is of a fruitful strategy to make a relation between L1 and L2⁹. The idea is that the relation between them is not of the type of logical relation because each of both L1 and L2 has meaning and denotation in separation. Truly, Makin (2000, p.19) states that, in contrast, this particular point is a crucial difference between logical and linguistic difference. If the relation between meaning and denotation was only linguistic we would scrutinize the relation by words or phrases. That the relation, then, would have nothing to suppose more than the meaning and the meaning would be expressed by the phrases as that which denotes only the denotation.

However, it seems that the possible expectation of Russell is to speak about denotation of denoting concepts, not the denoting concepts themselves. It is a distinction between denoting concepts considered in their own rights and the denotation of such concepts as a distinction between their meaning and their denotation (Makin, p.38-39).

After all, I think Makin tries to look at this relation as a function. The denotation of a denoting complex stipulates a function only for the denotations of denoting complexes (Makin, p.27). When we replace a constituent complex of a proposition with another with the same denotation then the denotation of the entire complex remains unchanged, because their function is uninterrupted.

Such approach and usage of the concept of function for the problem may not be possible, because the constituents of a proposition are conceived entities (Pakaluk, p.46) without functions, or if a function should be taken is of logical procedures for the application. L1 in (1) is in a subject position with an occurred entity while in (2) it has a different complex. By (1) we get a proposition about its denotation and in (2) we have a proposition about the complex’s denotation (Makin, p.27). In the words of Pakaluk (p.46) constituents¹⁰ are indicated by words that are used in the statement that expresses that proposition. Using pakaluk’s idea, it could be added that meanings simply are those complexes of entities that bear the relation to entities outside of the proposition, for instance to realized objects, things or even ideas.

Consequently, two different views can be selected: first, a linguistic expression (including words and ideas) indicates a denoting complex in a proposition which denotes something or someone outside of the proposition and has a logical relation with the meaning and denotation. Second, that linguistic expression indicates a denoting complex which is the meaning¹¹ at the same time and place of the constituents.

Due to Makin and also Russell, the main concern is that if we want to understand L1 we refer to its complex denotation (i.e. country, south, Azerbaijan) expressed from higher levels of inversion, but what about the L2’s constituents? There does not seem to be an immediate answer. It will even be more difficult stepping to higher level of

⁹ For more details see: Pakaluk (1993, p45), Russell (1905)

¹⁰ Constituents of the proposition: denoting complexes, denotation and meaning.

¹¹ It also worth to not that the meaning in both ways is not psychological.

meaning and denotations (i.e. by putting a proposition several times into brackets and so have L1, L2 and etc.) Russell's restriction in looking at phrases, not names or nouns, is not entirely helpful as well (Seto, 1983). Also, I do not think we may explain the issue through indication of phrases to denotation. Indication and denotation presuppose the relation between phrases inverted without bring the logical and cognitive properties into the denoting game.

Although, Russell suggests that denoting is achieved by virtue of the descriptive content in the denoting phrase, still it could be criticized that in the case of some terms, doubts could be happen whether terms are names or descriptions; 'God', as a term, does describe God as the unique divine being or is it a name of God? I think denoting phrases appear in sentences that appear in a broader context. There may be implications that arise from the use of a denoting phrase beyond the composite meaning gleaned from the words in order to be appeared in the denoting phrase. Makin also thinks that "L" has something quite different mean by "L1" and "L1" than "L2" and etc. He believes that (2000) "we are never required to go from denotation to meaning. This is because at first level being given pair the denotation already puts us in a position where we can speak or reason about it, and if we are given only the complex, then we can proceed from it to the denotation." (p.31).

5. Rephrasing Gray's Elegy Argument

The story continues putting forth the below three examples:

1. The meaning of the first line of Gray's Elegy
2. The meaning of the 'the curfew tolls the knell of parting day'
3. The meaning of the "the first line of the Gray's Elegy"

By reducing¹² them into symbolic form, we have:

1. The meaning of C
2. The meaning of 'C'
3. The meaning of "C"

Russell claims that "Similarly 'the denotation of C' does not mean the denotation we want, but means something which, if it denotes at all, denotes what is denoted by the denotation we want. For example, let 'C' be the denoting complex occurring in the second of the above instances. Then

C= 'the first line of Gray's Elegy', and

The denotation on C= the curfew tolls the knell of parting day. But what we mean to have as the denotation was 'the first line of the Gray'Elegy'. Thus we have failed to get what we wanted." (ibid)

¹² Russell by reducing meaning and denotation into formal level wants to emphasis on the relatedness and difference, at the same time, of the meaning and denotation on linguistic and meta – linguistic (by meta linguistic level I mean higher order) levels.

This idea seek that if the denoting phrase is made part of the phrase for speaking about its meaning (as in ‘the meaning of C’), the resulting phrase will give us a meaning other than the intended one. Denotation and meaning in a simple phrase seems clear, but then when one phrase is embedded in another, we need the denotation of the whole phrase to determine the first phrase’s denotation.

This presents a paradoxical phenomenon. Since the first phrase embodied in another complex one, by this view, may denote something other than what it was in the simple one. Makin thinks (2000) this problem is not because of using "the notion of meaning and denotation, but rather in the very fact of their being denoting phrases at all" (p.37). In contrast, Pakaluk (1994) thinks that the meaning is not, so to speak, a competitor with the denotation, but rather that which makes denotation possible in the first place (see p.52 for more details). The hierarchy of bracketing prepares a way for the claim that denotation presupposes meaning - not the claim that denotation is always accompanied by meaning.

Nevertheless, the series of { C, 'C', "C", ""C"", ... } involves infinity. In the derived denotation, ideas, objects or things, or any *elements* (*e*) included in the lexical, sentential and propositional productions are also infinite. Makin (p.35) names it “the twin phenomena” in which using ‘the denotation of C’ results in speaking not of the denotation of ‘C’, but of the denotation of its denotation. However, a question is that how the elements {e1, e2, e3, en} of a C make a sequential, casual and relational chain with references outside of a proposition for a meaning via denotation.

A possible method is that this loop of logical interconnection of realized elements with elements in the upper level of denotation fall to a reduction of meaning from upper level of denotation to the lowest level, C, and finally to the elements of the intended phrase i.e. objects and ideas. As I saw, the process of reductions of a proposition acquires meaning through a cut of its elements and integration of elements in lower level of denotation. In other words, integration of any *e* in a sentence makes a sentence denote something, someone or some idea via previous level of integration process, provided that the integration has been done causally and in an experiencing process. Otherwise denotation will occur but denoting would account null.

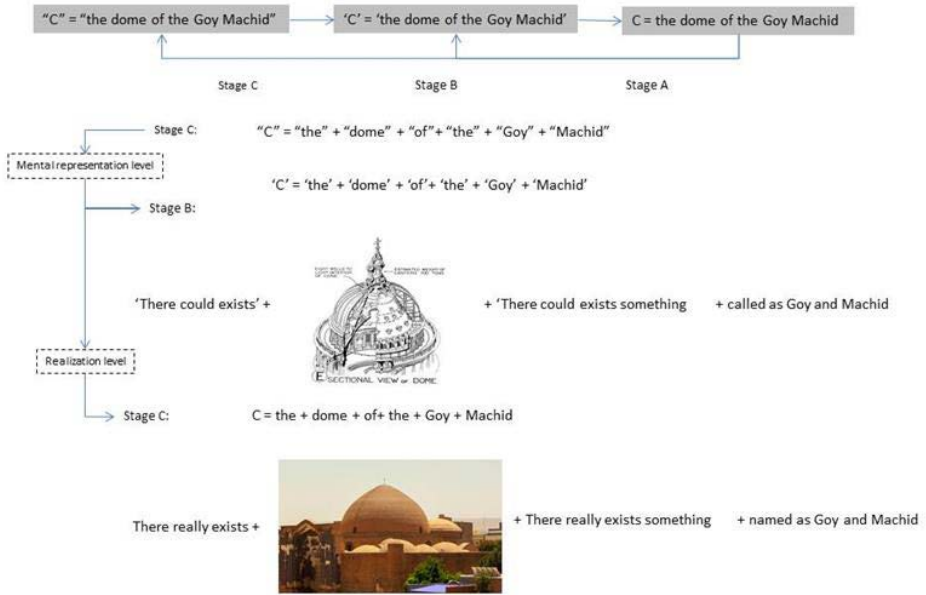


Figure 1. Meaning via denotation process goes from denotation “C” to C. This process is a reduction in three stages. Stage A is a reduction of “C” elements into the range of elements in ‘C’. This stage is in the mental level. Stage B stays in a mental presentation level too, but delineates an upper level of experience and observation. Stage C is a reduction to realized objects or ideas.

So far so good. The process of denotation reduction starts by mental presentation reduction of every *e* to objects that empower existence of *e*. For instance, in a phrase called *the dome of the Goy Machid*, the meaning of ‘the dome of the Goy Machid’ is derived from denotation “C” which is a sum of denotation of each element i.e. [“the”, “dome”, “of”, “the”, “Goy”, “machid”]. The derived meaning from this level travels towards the sum of *es* in ‘C’ i.e. [‘the’, ‘dome’, ‘of’, ‘the’, ‘Goy’, ‘Machid’] and finally is meant by an integration of *e* in C i.e. [the, dome, of, the, Goy, Machid] with modalities. It means that for a reader who does not know what C refers or means, the meaning from denotation “C” would stay possible / impossible at subjective or mental level unless s/he reduces it to the reality for which there will be realized references (See Figure 1).

Notice that the range of *es* in each proposition of denotation is ideas and objects and its domain depends on the experiment and observation of the perceiver rated with received information. Domain is the rate of meaningfulness via experienced references. Experiencing every *e* increases the level of realized reference of the *e* and makes the *e* more meaningful. Less experience or observation keep the proposition at the level of

language experiences, whereas enriched experience provides more realized information of any e and its quantifier.

According to the mentioned proposal, the idea of meaning is retreated by epidemic –ontological reduction via denotation and would be symbolized as:

$$R: e_{idea} \rightarrow e_{object}$$

$$D: e_{experienced\ rate}$$

A definition of C is:

$$C = \bigcup_{i=0}^n R(e_i) \quad 1-1$$

$R(e_n)$ is the causal relation of every elements (e) with the domain (D) of experiences. The relation of ideas to objects could be internal relation of elements which take place in an assembly of the realized space of elements, but the external relation of elements is derivation of denotations by levels of bracketing through experience of references. The internal relation in an inverting level is not transitive (Brogaard,2006) because of the unique roles of action they may take in the phrasing positions, but external relations of elements intransitively can committee to denoting levels.

The directness rate of denoting relation comes from accessibility of experiences to objects, or ideas or information within mind. The following relation for denoting proposition of C which brings the meaning form realized level to mental presentation, is represented as:

$$C = \bigcup_{i=0}^n R(e_i)q \quad 1-2$$

where q is existential level of quantifiers of each level. Existential level of quantifiers provides a transition within the experiential level. Thus, relation of elements refers to informational level within the world and the mind. The bracketing will thus mean a generalization from the experiences of elements, which leads us to:

$$dC^n = \bigcup_{i=1}^n dC^{n-1} + C \quad 1-3$$

where d is called denotation of proposition of C in the range of 1 to n experiential level of elements for $n \neq 0$. Without experiencing an element in its space there will be no denotation, even though some may believe that still a meaning can be defined for.

In addition, C in first relation (1-1) is a realized level which is very objective and its quantifiers dedicate the existential scale. C will donate the elements of its phrase due to directedness rate. The element and relation of this level is acquired and validated by

observation to gain meaning and its truth value, whereas $n \neq 0$ goes to mental representation level that quantifiers are mental assumption of existence.

Quantifiers in every denotation show ordered existence of elements from subjective level of the idea to the reality. In the logical language, quantifiers which denote the C are existential necessity ($\square \exists e$) and quantifiers in $n \neq 0$ are existential possibility ($\diamond \exists e$). Given these modalities, a model of denotation for $n \neq 0$ depends on the possibility and necessity of representation of elements.

On this view, C is a derivation of dC with the sequences of possibilities towards realities:

$$C = \frac{\partial(dC)}{\partial \diamond q} \quad 1-4$$

where C and denotation of C (i.e., dC) by substituting appropriate operators of possibility and necessity in (1-2) and (1-3) will be built up a meaning as:

$$C = \square q \bigcup_{i=1}^n e_i \quad 1-5$$

$$dC = \diamond (\square q \bigcup_{i=1}^n e_i) \quad 1-6$$

Generalization will provide us a meaning for C as sum of necessarily integration of leveling elements within the observed space and operation of quantifier on the integration process:

$$C = \sum_{i=1}^n \left(\square q^i \left(\bigcup_{j=1}^{k-1} e_j + \bigcup_{j=k}^n e_j \right) \right) \quad 1-7$$

$$dC^n = \prod_{z=0}^n (\diamond^z \left(\sum_{i=1}^n \square q^i \left(\bigcup_{j=1}^{k-1} e_j + \bigcup_{j=k}^n e_j \right) \right)) \quad 1-8$$

Therefore, the fact that dC^n denotes at least one element obtains independently of any sentence in which C occurs. In the light of this process, reduction will go sequentially back from high ordered denotation to the denoting stage of propositions. It will be processed by a derivation of quantifiers from dC^n . That says, according to the relation (1-4), the relation (1-5) would be derived from (1-8) on the existential possibility of quantifiers to reach the existential necessity of quantifiers and elements. Nothing that achieving existential necessity of quantifiers provides meaning, but it still needs to be validated by observations of elements of the propositions to avoid indeterminacy of truth-value.

6. Conclusion

Makin states that meaning is a crucial difference between the logical and linguistic difference of its denotation. Additionally, Pakaluk's idea states that meanings simply are those complexes of entities that bear the relation to entities outside of the proposition. The difference of Makin's model with Pakaluk is that in the model of Makin a meaning can be a denotation when one wants to go into higher order levels. It is almost the one Russell bothers with. That is the denotation of a phrase has the meaning (as well as denotation) and the meaning of a phrase has denotation (as well as meaning). One possible idea is to consider every element of phrases and denotational propositions in a logical interaction chain as to reach the basic realized objects, things and ideas and also to achieve the relatedness level of meanings and denotations. One type of formulization was introduced to understand meaning via processed denotation. This attempt was a sort of derivation form mental representation to realization. The proposed symbolization revealed that quantifying depends on the level of necessity and experience of a viewer. Finally it was argued that the relations are logical interaction between every element of denoted propositions.

Anlamdan Anlamlandırmaya Doğru Bir İnceleme

Özet

Gray'in *Ağıt'*ı anlamlandırma ve işaret edici kavramların ifade edilmesi hakkında bir argümandır. İşaret edici kavramlar önermelerde, niceleyici sözcüklerde bu önermeleri ifade eden cümlelerde ortaya çıkar. Russell, bu argümanı anlamı ifadeden ayırmak için kullanır. Bu çalışma söz konusu argümanı, Makin ve Pakaluk tarafından ortaya koyulan iki farklı görüşün karşılaştırılmasında kullanmaktadır. Çalışma, işaret edici sözcüğün ya da ideler ve nesnelere zinciri tarafından ifade *hakkında* haline getirilen önermedeki bileşik yapının anlamının tartışılmasıyla sonlanmaktadır. Son adımda, bu öneriye ilişkin formülizasyon verilmektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler

İfade, Gray'in Ağıt', Kavramlar ve Anlam.

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