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The Theory of Translation
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THE THEORY OF TRANSLATION

W. HAAS

I

To translate is one thing; to say how we do it, is another. The practice is familiar enough, and there are familiar theories of it. But when we try to look more closely, theory tends to obscure rather than explain, and the familiar practice—an ancient practice, without which Western civilisation is unthinkable—appears to be just baffling, its very possibility a mystery.

To translate, Dr Johnson tells us, is 'to change into another language, retaining the sense'; and it is easy to agree with him. But can we think it out? How do we effect this exchange of languages? Is it like changing horses or carriages? And what, exactly, is it that we retain? Images are powerful instruments of interpretation. But this one, the image of something carried across from one vehicle to another, can it bear the weight we put upon it?

At first sight, this is what we are tempted to make of translation —an operation with three terms: two expressions, and a meaning they share. When we translate, we seem to establish a relation of three distinct entities, each separately apprehended: the two expressions seen on paper or heard in the air, and the meaning in the translator's mind. The meaning, presumably, we 'retain' and translate; we 'transfer' it from one expression to the other. Strictly, then, when a sentence or speech or novel is translated, say, from French into English, what is supposed to be translated or transferred is not the French sentence or speech or novel at all; it is something utterly different, something inaudible and invisible—'the meaning' itself, which is not in French nor in English nor in any language whatever.

This interpretation of translation as a triadic relation does, of course, accord with some deeply ingrained habits of thought. It conforms with a model which we are inclined to apply to all conscious and voluntary manifestations of human life. As a human being might be thought of as the temporary embodiment of an independent soul, so a spoken sentence is regarded as the temporary expression of an independent meaning. The translator might then be said to effect a migration of meanings. Translation is supposed to be possible on account of a twofold relation of an entity, called 'meaning'; two expressions are viewed as 'vehicles' of the same meaning. Thus:

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Sign 1
↑
(————————————————————)
Expression 1   ———→Meaning   ←——— Expression 2
(————————————————————————)
↓
Sign 2
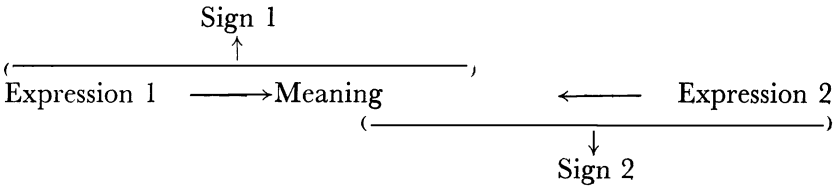
What is cardinal, here, is a theory of meaning, which interprets 'significant expression' ('sign', in linguistic terminology) as constituted by a relation of two distinct entities: an expression and a meaning. The relation itself is mysterious. The vehicle has a ghostly passenger. Inevitably, a 'triadic' theory of translation implies some form of a 'dualist', and therefore mysterious, theory of meaning.

There can be no doubt that we should be hard put to it, if having done some particular piece of translation, we were asked to explain it in terms of this theory. We should only be aware of having operated with *expressions*, and we could say something about such operations. We should be able to explain the difference between a good and a bad translation in terms of their respective expressions; we should refer to their occurrences among other expressions, and among persons and things. To take an example, we might argue that a famous poem by Goethe about Italy which begins with the line: '*Kennst du das Land, wo die Zitronen blühn?*' has been translated badly, when in English it was made to begin: 'Knowst thou the land . . .'. Our argument would be that '*Kennst du . . .*' is a straightforward piece of colloquial language, as one might say "Do you know the shop where the sale is on?" ' (*Kennst du den Laden/ . . . Herrn Schmidt/ . . . meinen Bruder*, etc.), whereas ' knowest thou' would be unusual in corresponding contexts. Again, we should say that '*Land*' occurs in very many contexts ('*Stadt und Land, Ausland, von Land zu Land*', *die südlichen Länder Europas*, etc.), where the corresponding English word would be 'country' ('town and country, foreign country, from country to country, southern countries', etc.), rather than 'land'.[1] At the same time, we shall reject equally 'Do you know the country': not only because at times German *Land* will also correspond to English *land*, rather than *country*—in contexts such as ' landscape' (*Landschaft*) ' land of promise' (*gelobtes Land*), ' land of dreams ' (*Land der Träume*)—but mainly because in such a translation, the important and far from common rhythm of the poem, which is established with this its first line, would be lost. In fact, we should not be able, here, to translate word for word, or even sentence for sentence; the line we have to find will have to be internally very different from the original if it is to preserve a comparable role within the poem as a whole. And having chosen,

[1] I borrow the example from Professor L. Forster's *Translation*, in 'Aspects of Translation' (Studies in Communication 2, 1958).

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rejected and accepted, we should explain what makes a better or a worse translation by saying to what extent there is a *correspondence* between (i) the habitual contexts (verbal and situational) of the given original expressions, and (ii) the contextual relations of the expressions used in the translation. But what, in any particular case, could we say, or be expected to say, about operations with *pure ideas*? A triadic theory of the craft of translation, if it were accepted at all—as, for want of a better, it might be—could not be regarded as a working-theory, not as a general account of how we do what we do. We should have to look upon it as some kind of 'ulterior explanation' of the finished work—'mere' theory, 'pure' theory, free from empirical tests, and devoid of technical implications.

It would seem to have fallen to the philosopher to deal with the difficulties of disembodied meanings. If there are such things, where do we find them? How observe them—those naked ideas under their changeable verbal clothing? (Another favourite metaphor, this, besides the 'vehicle of sense'!) Do we ever find them *without* their verbal clothes, just in their natural state?

We are familiar with various attempts to deal with these difficulties. Generally, the dualist scheme of the linguistic sign is preserved, and with it the basic triadic scheme of translation. It is within these limits that the attempt is made to rescue 'pure meanings' from their shadowy existence; generally, by tying them to, or even replacing them by, 'pure' physical facts. Meanings are then said to be 'references' to such facts, 'denotations'; and one expression is supposed to be a translation of another, if both have the same denotation. It is true that this is rarely considered to be quite enough. The two expressions, in addition to their denotation, would be required to share an aptitude for calling forth certain responses, certain 'emotive overtones', and they would have to incorporate a number of purely syntactical operations. There would be a large bag of tricks—some more, some less important—but all of them, mere accessories to communication. They either presuppose 'reference', or, like a sigh or a smile, can dispense with language altogether. The core of meaning is supposed to be denotation, factual reference.

There seem to be two main variants of the reference-theory of meaning. There are, firstly, those following Ogden and Richards[1] who would try to tie 'ideas' or 'meanings' (or, as they call them, 'references') to external things ('referents'), giving us a three-term elaboration of the 'dualist' theory of linguistic signs:

$$\text{Expression} \longrightarrow (\text{Reference} \longrightarrow \text{Referent})$$

[1]C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning*, Ch. 1.

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Expressions, here, refer indirectly. We may call this the theory of *indirect reference*. It gives us a five-term elaboration of the triadic scheme for translation:

Expression 1→[Reference 1→Referent←Reference 2]←Expression 2

The middle term is presented as being, itself, a relation of three terms: namely, of two 'ideas' or 'meanings' or 'references' (each peculiar to the speakers of a particular language) to the same external things (the same 'referent').[1]

Others have persuaded themselves that—in theory at any rate—we can do away with specifically mental facts; that 'reference' need not involve any 'thing in the mind'. This gives us again a simple dyadic relation for the linguistic sign:

Expression ——→Referent,

the reference of the expression (the arrow) being explained as a physiological disposition or habit we have of using that expression for denoting certain facts. We might call this a theory of *direct reference*. It presents translation as a simple relational scheme of just three physical terms:

Expression 1 ——→Referent ←——Expression 2

This, it might seem at first sight, dispels the mystery. We seem to have succeeded in avoiding the puzzle of psycho-physical relations. For we are supposed to operate with ordinary external facts only —with expressions amongst persons and things. On closer examination, however, the puzzles turn out to be still with us. The crucial relation we are said to establish when using or translating an expression is still a relation of correspondence between *two distinct orders of thing*, linguistic and extralingual. This is why, even in the case of a theory of direct reference, we may still speak of a dualist view of linguistic signs; and also, why we find that we are still mystified about their meaning, and about translation.

I am not here concerned with the relative merits of different dualist theories of meaning; and I have no interpretation of my own to offer of that opaque and puzzling something which is supposed to 'correspond' to linguistic expressions. I have nothing to say of that extralingual second term of the alleged sign-relation, the middle term of the alleged triadic scheme of translation. Rather, I am concerned to show that the 'of' in 'meaning of' *cannot* be interpreted as a relation of correspondence between two orders of fact, and that translation is *not* an operation with three terms. If there are such entities as are postulated in a dualist theory of sign and a triadic theory of translation—if there are pure meanings or pure external

[1] Cf. the interesting paper by C. Rabin on 'The Linguistics of Translation' in *Aspects of Translation*, p. 125.

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facts, there is certainly nothing we can say about them. We cannot rescue the former from their occult state by tying them to, or replacing them by, the latter. The facts, or referents so-called, if supposed to be grasped independently of any and every language, are themselves as shadowy and nebulous as the naked ideas they are meant to reinforce or to replace.

Expressions 'have meanings', and they are, themselves, external things amongst others. But both external things and meanings dissolve in a dualist interpretation of linguistic signs. They are assigned positions which they cannot occupy; they are placed beyond the reach of the conceptual tools of language.

II.

That meanings cannot survive in a dualist theory of signs has been shown—and shown with admirable clarity—by some of the more recent studies in the philosophy of language.[1] 'What an expression means' cannot be found as a separate entity beside the expression. If we insist on having it this way, expression will have nothing to express, and reference nothing to refer to. Meanings, we have learned, are not entities or objects corresponding to expressions; they are the *uses* of expressions; they are the work expressions do. It remains true that the meaning of an utterance is not *in* it. But neither is it an object beside it. It includes and transcends the utterance, as my walking includes and transcends my legs. What an expression means, is not an object confronting it, any more than my walking is an object confronting my legs.

The instrumental view of language allows us to discover what is discoverable about meanings, ideas, concepts, propositions; and it delivers us from some very common temptations to pursue chimeras.

It is important, though, to observe, where exactly the line is drawn between fancy and fact. Errors of mistaken identity are not uncommon. Especially, there seems to be some inclination to assume (i) that mental facts are among the chimeras, and (ii) that 'bare facts' confronting expressions are not. I shall try to deal with these two misconceptions.

II (*1*). First, an instrumental interpretation of meaning does not entail any denial of mental events. On the contrary, it seems to imply that events which we commonly describe as mental, rather than physical, do occur. There must be memories, organised memories. For no *single* use of a word can establish it as significant.

[1] Cf. L. Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books, Philosophical Investigations.* G. Ryle, *Ordinary Language* (Phil. Review, 1953), 'The Theory of Meaning' in *British Philosophy in the Mid-century.* J. R. Firth, *Papers in Linguistics* (chs. 3, 14–16).

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The meaning of a word is a collection, an organised recollection, of many individual uses of it, i.e. of various occurrences of it: in verbal and non-verbal contexts, and in positions in which it contrasts with other words. Meaning (like skill) is an 'acquired property'. Whenever a word is being used significantly, another use is added to remembered uses of it; a present context joins the previous ones. Clearly, the organised memories of a word's uses are what would ordinarily be described as *mental events*. So would its present choice from a number of contrasting words. There are relations, even relations of correspondence, between a word's present employment and those other employments which we remember. Moreover, any word I am using now may be abstracted from its context and be treated as a physical fact (for instance, by acousticians or phoneticians or by lexicographers making an entry), while, without its being presently used, its past uses may be 'recalled to mind' (e.g. in a dictionary paraphrase or definition). Signs are souvenirs. When active and actually employed in a new context, they act as reminders of contexts past, or they could mean nothing.

Have we come full circle? Are we back at physical symbols as 'vehicles' of 'bare ideas'? Not quite; and the difference is important. What an inert physical expression may remind us of is not any unverbalised pure idea. What we remember is that same expression in past employments: both *among* other expressions and *in contrast* to other expressions. Our memories or ideas are not extralingual, not 'without language'.

The difference between this articulate account of meaning and the traditional 'vehicle' theory appears most clearly, when we consider translation. Even if '*the* meaning' of an expression is identified with a recollection of its past uses: such a collection of previous occurrences of an expression—in a variety of verbal as well as non-verbal contexts, and in contrast with a variety of other expressions—could not possibly qualify as that kind of 'pure idea', which is supposed to be indifferent to its linguistic setting, and, therefore, transportable from one linguistic vehicle to another. Here, meaning is not an entity beside the expression; it is a particular expression at work, actual work and remembered work. Such work is not a piece of transferable freight. It cannot be transported to another expression in another language, any more than the 'goodwill' of a shop can be transported to another shop in another town. It can be transferred to another user of the same shop in the same town. Another shop in another town can only *parallel* its 'goodwill'. What we have found is no 'bare idea'. We have found expressions which recall expressions in use. All the facts we are dealing with—the expressions and their environments—are on the same plane: they

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may be actually perceived as external things, and they may be remembered.

Memory is, indeed, a problem. So is choice. But neither is a mere enigma. Our problem—and this is our gain—has become articulated, familiar, and manageable. We are familiar with relating our habits or memories to present experience. We know how to trace acquired skill in the carpenter's use of a hammer; and we know how to trace acquired significance in a man's use of a word. The meaning of a word has a history; we may have records of its past uses. But we cannot know even what it *could* be like to perceive a carpenter's skill, as another thing *beside* his tools, or a word-less idea as a separate thing *beside* a word. We have no way of relating present things (such as hammers being handled, or words being uttered) to objects on 'another plane'. What an expression 'conveys' is not a passenger from another world. Its meaning, a bequest from its past, is related to a given word in some such way as yesterday's walk is related to my legs here and now. To be sure, I may recall it to mind—yesterday's walk or the meaning. But a walk, whether present or remembered, is not a legless affair; and 'what a word means' is not a word-less idea. Nor is it a word-less physical fact. 'Bare facts' are as diaphanous as 'bare ideas': this is my second point about the dividing line between fancy and fact.

II (*2*). Some, who profess to accept the view that 'the meaning of an expression is its use', seem to claim that they are only making this view more articulate by telling us, more specifically about the 'use' of expressions, that it consists in referring them to extra-lingual facts in our physical environment. Essentially, they say, meaning (or 'the use' of an expression) is *denotation*. In this way, the instrumental approach to language appears to be assimilated to a theory of reference. This appearance of an amalgamation of the two theories seems to me utterly deceptive. Expressions cannot be 'used' for referring to bare and neutral facts.

Denotation has of course been queried recently. It has been argued that though there are *some* expressions which do denote, 'there is not one basic mould, such as the "Fido"—Fido mould, into which all significant expressions are to be forced.' Even such as may be said to 'denote' are found to do a good many other things besides. (This is why, for instance, 'the Morning-Star' would not pass as an adequate translation of 'l'Étoile du Soir', though the two have the same denotation).[1] These denials seem to be wholly justified. But must we not go further? It is hard to see how denotation, as generally understood, can be credited even with so much as a partial explana-

[1] G. Ryle, 'The Theory of Meaning' in *British Philosophy in the Mid-Century*, 256.

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tion of some meanings. Correspondence to bare extralingual facts seems to be a mere fiction. It cannot account even for the meaning of 'Fido', either all or part of it.

I do not deny that there is a genuine operation with expressions which one may choose to describe as 'denoting' or 'referring'. We do use expressions for the purpose of referring to things other than expressions. Our stock of significant expressions may be augmented by this operation; but only by assigning both the new expression and the new thing places among other expressions, never by merely referring one to the other. 'The use of an expression' cannot consist in referring it to 'bare' extralingual things. It is true that, in the present climate of opinion, we might feel safer in attaching expressions to extralingual things in physical space than we would in associating them with extralingual things in a *Geistesraum*.[1] But, we cannot do either.

I am not trying to advocate some kind of Neo-Berkeleyan metaphysics—some 'to be is to be spoken of'. It would seem to be absurd to deny the *existence* of things 'without' language, whether things physical or things mental—even though, naturally, we could say nothing about such existence. Affinities with Kantian epistemology would appear to be far more plausible. Having persuaded ourselves that conceptual thought, for all we can say about it, consists in 'operating with words',[2] it appears that things outside language— i.e. things unaffected by our operations with words—are something as opaque, and unprofitable to 'refer to', as the Kantian 'thing in itself'. Our world—remembered, imagined, or perceived—is organised by the language we speak.

What are we to make, then, of the notion of 'extralingual reference'?—There is a perfectly sensible interpretation of it. But this cannot tell us how meanings are created in pre- or extra-lingual space, physical or spiritual. We are familiar with the experience of having an idea, image, or concept, as yet lacking a word for it, or the experience of discovering some thing in our physical environment, without having a name for it. We might ask 'What shall we call it?' or 'What is it called?' But such experiences are not enough for extra-lingual reference. Those things we seek a name for are not extralingual in the required sense. We can always say a great deal about them; indeed, we may be able to describe them quite adequately, and entirely with the help of words already at our disposal. The fact that we may want another word for a thing, besides the

[1] *Geistesraum* being the most serious drawback of some inquiries into 'semantic fields' which are otherwise of considerable interest (cf. J. Trier's works, e.g. *Deutsche Bedeutungsforschung* in 'Germanische Philologie', 1934).

[2] G. Ryle, *Ordinary Language* (Philosophical Review, 1953), p. 185.

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many which are already involved with it, is nothing to establish a reference-theory of meaning. The least that such a theory requires is that the thing, which lacks a name, should be *capable* of being singled out for reference, *without there being any other expressions at all*: none except the one by which we want to 'refer' to it. Of this one we should be able to say what Russell says of the words in his 'object-language': that it has 'meaning in isolation', or that it has been learnt 'without its being necessary to have previously learnt other words.'[1] What is it that is being asked for, here? Fact or chimera? What evidence could we possibly have of a word having meaning or having been learnt *in isolation*? There might be just one word that could provide such evidence:—the first word I ever learned. But what a dubious fiction that would be! Could it be a word at all?

The theory of isolated reference is clearly not meant to be put to the test of observation. It is *in principle* unverifiable. Whatever experience we have of referring to external things, or to ideas, is not an experience of isolated reference. So far from *explaining* the meanings of expressions—even of the referring type—reference *presupposes* a language of significant expressions.

Even very young children asking 'What is it called?' do not merely refer to, they can tell us a lot about, 'it'! For this very reason it interests them. They have already rejected a large number of words as inappropriate to the thing, or they would not ask its name. They have prepared a large number of utterance-frames which the new name will fit into; and where it will join, and contrast with, a large number of other words which already fit those frames.—An 'Alsatian'? . . . runs, . . . barks, . . . is big, . . . has a thick fur, I don't like . . .s, etc. The question 'What is it?' or 'What is it called?' is *a request to fill in a blank* in an indefinite number of incomplete expressions; it is a request, we might say, for notational help in giving new values to a number of prepared utterance-functions—help in fixing an organisation of utterances about a new focal term. Long before it is named, the new thing has already been placed; and it has been contrasted with other things that run or bark, or are big or have a thick fur, are not liked, etc. It has been so placed and contrasted by the help of expressions which were already dealing with it. When I am looking for a word, 'have it on the tip on my tongue', this is never a case of some 'pure idea' or 'brute fact' begging a name; it is always a case of fragmentary utterances seeking completion. The blank is a variable in a large number of determinate functions; it has a determinate range, and I can already give it many determinate and contrasting values. The variable is the 'unknown' in given expressions. But there is no need to interpret it as an impercep-

[2]B. Russell, *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth*, 65.

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tible 'soul' searching for its body, or a 'thing in itself' wanting a label.

Nobody will deny the existence of extralingual things. But do we ever come across one requiring a name, without there being a large number of expressions already engaged with it?[1] Is it not with such 'mere things' as with Wm. James's 'pure experience'? 'Only new-born babes', he said, 'or men in semi-coma from sleep, drugs, ill-nesses, or blows, may be assumed to have an experience pure in the literal sense of a *that* which is not yet any definite *what*.'[2] Reference to such 'pure experience' is required by a 'reference theory of meaning'. This is what Russell has brought out so clearly. If we wish to explain meaning by 'extralingual reference', then we must insist on a complete and permanent dualism of two orders of thing—linguistic expressions on the one hand, and extralingual things on the other. We must accept the fiction of *isolated references*. This dualism cannot be substantiated in any way; and it makes no dif-ference whether the extralingual things are ideas in the mind or physical facts. For 'reference' to make its sign-producing link, words and other things must be supposed to be permanently divided. My argument is that there is no such division, hence no such link, hence no theory of meaning in terms of such a link.

We can have no conception of what it might be like to confront the general blur of a world that is not already prepared and organ-ised by the use of some signs. Learning a language, or extending it, is not like drawing a map by putting in one line or one colour at a time. This we *can* do; but only because we have another language at our disposal, which tells us where to draw the lines and what colours to put in. The map-maker does not confront a world without language. He is, in fact, a translator—from the language of words into a restricted language of lines and colours.

Those who have tried seriously to construct a language by means of operations of 'reference' have in fact usually proceeded in analog-ous fashion. Like the cartographer, they worked on the basis of a given language, selecting 'things' already circumscribed. They selected what was suitable for 'reference', as a cartographer selects what is suitable for a map. They picked out what their language allowed them to describe as 'external things', of various kinds. They did not try to refer to 'bare facts'; and the fiction, often upheld, that they *might* have done so, or even that ordinary language might have done so in the first place, is neither here nor there.

The construction of an 'object-language' can be of considerable

[1] Cf. L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* on Ostensive Definition, par. 28 ff, especially par. 30/31.
[2] Wm. James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism* ('The Thing and Its Relations'), 93 f.

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interest. It may be important to know what *can* be translated into
a special language which would restrict the meanings of expressions
by rules of reference: e.g. by the rule that the significant use of every
accepted expression should be capable of being accompanied by a
significant pointing-gesture. In this way, rules of reference can *restrict*
the meanings of expressions within a given language, but they
cannot, by themselves, *establish* a language. Nothing can come of
mere pointing into a world of bare 'thats'. For (i) pointing itself, if
it is to be of any use as an operation of reference, must have a mean-
ing, which cannot be established by pointing, and (ii) it can have
meaning only as part of a language.

(i) If it is of any use, pointing is no mere gesture, any more than
a word is a mere noise. Like a word, a pointing finger 'has meaning';
and it is a conventional sign. Some communities point with their
chins, others with eyes and brows; we do it with hands and fingers;
pointing is clearly not like laughter or tears: it is not a natural
physiological symptom. For a dog (and presumably for a child) to
learn the meaning of a pointing finger is as difficult as to learn the
meaning of an uttered noise. The gesture-language of pointing may
include a variety of signs: rigid ('beam') pointing, sweeping ('area')
pointing, scanning, pointing at various angles, forward, sideways,
upward, etc. Each of these can acquire meaning *only as part of a
language.* That is,

(ii) whatever actual experience we have of the gesture-language
of pointing, shows it in the role of an auxiliary language. By itself
it would be hopelessly ambiguous. (At a race, how do we point at
the track, at a horse, its rider, his number, his cap, his whip, his
skill, at the horse's breed, its colour, its speed?) 'Such ambiguity is
commonly resolved by accompanying the pointing with . . . words'
such as 'this track', 'this horse', 'this colour', etc., assuming that the
words 'track', 'horse', etc., are already intelligible.[1] This assumption
is made, even when we establish or explain the meaning of a *new*
word by pointing. We cannot establish it by *mere* pointing. We might
say, for instance, 'This colour is jonquil'. 'The ostensive definition
explains the use—the meaning—of the word when the overall role
of the word in the language is clear',[2] i.e. when we know it is some
individual thing, or a colour, or a shape, etc., that is being pointed
at. It appears that I 'must already be master of a language in order
to understand an ostensive definition'.[3]

Meanings, then, which are established by ostensive definition
cannot be neutral between different languages. Jonquil, for instance,

[1]W. V. O. Quine, *From a Logical Point of View*, 67.
[2]L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigation*, § 30.
[3]*Ibidem*, § 33.

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will be definitely a kind of yellow and no kind of red in English; but it need be nothing of the sort for someone like a speaker of Bassa, a language of Liberia, which has only one word to correspond to both 'red' and 'yellow', even if it were defined for him by apparently the same pointing-gesture and in the same situation.[1]

One might, perhaps, try to distinguish between 'what is meant' and 'what is pointed at', by saying that we may 'point at' the same thing, even though 'meaning' different things. 'What we point at' would then be neutral between different languages, though what we mean when pointing might not be. A reference-theory of meaning, and of translation, must insist that this is so. But how could we *know* this? How could we know that 'what we point at' is neutral between different languages, if we can never find it except *within* some language or other? Strictly speaking, even when I say of two persons, as I did, that they appear to be witnessing the same pointing-gesture in the same situation, 'the same' means 'the same in the language in which I describe it'—e.g. when I say, 'Three people together, one of them raising his arm'. Of situations so described, I *can* claim to know that often different things are 'meant' or 'pointed at' by the same gesture, for speakers of different languages. I do not know this by comparing 'what they mean' with something neutral and extra-lingual that is 'just there'—for I have no access to things outside language; I know it by a process of *translation*. I compare the uses of expressions (including pointing-gestures) which belong to different languages. I find, for instance, an Eskimo distributing three different words over the 'same situations' (including the same pointings), in which an Englishman utters the one word 'snow'. The two, I conclude, cannot mean and cannot 'point at' the same thing. There is no puzzle here: each points at facts which are circumscribed by *his* language.

However, the ghost of bare and neutral facts is not an easy one to lay. Reference theories of meaning have made an effort to rescue ostensive definitions from their emplacement in particular languages. A universally valid, 'logical' procedure of generalisation seemed capable of replacing the caprice of varying linguistic directives. The operations of 'isolated reference'—pointing, for instance—will be supplemented: but instead of submitting to linguistic guidance, we are to rely on something like Mill's Canons of Induction. No single pointing-gesture or apposite utterance is then supposed to be sufficient for establishing the meaning of an expression; but a

[1] It is on record that the botanists required two general colour-terms which would correspond to the only two colour words of Bassa. They created, but with reference to their own languages, *xanthic* and *cyanic*. Cf. H. A. Gleason, *An Introduction to Descriptive Linguistics*, 4 f.

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number of such would be assumed to accomplish it. Collectively, they would be credited with establishing a 'habitual association' between, on the one hand, a set of similar extralingual facts, and, on the other, a set of similar utterances. In this way, we are supposed to make utterances significant, indeed to construct a whole language —a restricted language of reference, a 'primary' or 'object' language of 'ostensive predicates'.[1]

It is clear at once that we cannot expect to find examples of such a language being developed from scratch; it will always be constructed by someone who is already master of another. This is why it would be better to make clear how a restricted language such as that of reference is *derived from some given ordinary language*, rather than try to do the reverse.[2] However, anyone subscribing to a 'correspondence theory' of meaning has a vested interest in postulating for his object-language 'possible independence' or 'possible priority', whatever that may mean. Otherwise, his referential meanings might be derived from other meanings, when they are supposed to be our original stock—the offspring purely from an intercourse of human utterances with bare and neutral facts.

Reference alone cannot generate meaning. Can it do so with the help of induction? Can the repetition and assembly of isolated references give us the meaning of an expression? This might seem plausible. After all, one might say, was there not a first significant expression? And is it not the point of isolated reference simply to assume of *every* expression of an object-language that it *might* have been the first?

We may well boggle at the pseudo-empiricism of a theory which requires us to view every significant expression as hidden in some mythological pre-history of the language to which it belongs— every expression as capable of having gathered its meaning in that one dramatic moment, long ago and unremembered, when it might have been uttered as the first. However, we need waste no time on these problems of verification, formidable though they are. For even if we assume that, somehow, empirical sense could be made of the notion of isolated reference, we should still have to ask whether any expression, by itself, could possibly be deemed to be significant; and it seems clear that such an expression, even if repeated and applied a hundred times, could never be said to have acquired

[1]Cf. e.g. B. Russell, *op. cit.*, pp. 67, 76; W. V. O. Quine, *op. cit.*, p. 68. S. Körner, *Conceptual Thinking*, p. 7.

[2]A special language of reference, constructed for the purposes of logical or epistemological inquiry, may of course be *compared* with ordinary language, without being made its core or source. Of the authors just mentioned, neither Quine nor Körner seems to be interested in 'deriving' ordinary language from the referential. Indeed, Professor Quine seems to repudiate the idea (*op. cit.*, p. 78).

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meaning. It could not be viewed as 'having meaning' until, on some occasion, we found it *inappropriate,* and said so: 'This and this and this is a cat. But *that* is *not* a cat. It's a *dog.*'[1] A language, one might say, requires at least two words. Language and meaning take their origin from difference of meaning. A language could conceivably be born with two words: and of as many as two, each refers to a world involved in language. Even a single 'other' word presupposes language, no matter whether this word, like 'not', is classed as belonging to a secondary logical language, or whether, like 'dog', it is considered to belong to the primary one—the 'object-language'.

Similar considerations apply to the presumed 'set of similar expressions'. There can be no such set, in isolation. Modern phonology has made it abundantly clear that we cannot even make up such a set without regard to other and contrasting sets. Unless there are other words, no word could have so much as determinate phonetic shape. We cannot say, for any particular language, what counts as repetition, as occurrence of a 'similar' expression, unless we know what counts as occurrence of a different one. The recurrent shape of 'cat' is determined by contrasts such as '*cat/pat/mat*; c*at/cot*; c*at/cap/can*'. For a Japanese, *wrong* is a repetition of *long, right* of *light* and *grammar* of *glamour.* This is simply because, in his language, though he does make use of both *l* and *r*, he has no need of their difference for distinguishing meanings. To him, they are in fact indistinguishably 'similar'. The l/r—difference is no more a bare fact, it is as much part of the English language as is the difference between what *light* and *right* 'mean'.

Nor could there be *neutral* facts in that hypothetical language-of-reference. Ostension or reference, when it is supplemented by rules of assembly and classification—no less than when it is supplemented by different languages—is free to generate a variety of different meanings. If we are supposed to refer to what is similar in a number of facts, the question must immediately be: 'Similar in what respect?' 'With what degree of similarity?' And the answer to these decisive questions can certainly not be found simply by referring to the facts. Is not what we call 'high' in English similar, *in some respect,* to what we call 'deep'? and therefore deserving of being compassed by just one word, as in Latin, where 'altus' corresponds to both? Is what we call 'blue' similar *enough* to what we

[1]Professor Körner would require of ostensive rules that they contain a 'comparing clause': this and this and 'everything like it'. But until we have said: 'That is *not* a cat' or 'That is a *dog*', *everything* is like a cat, in some sense. Professor Körner says that we have understood an ostensive rule, 'when we are competent to give further instances or to give "anti-examples"' (*Conceptual Thinking,* pp. 7, 33). If '*or*', here, were replaced by '*and*', my point would be made. (Professor Körner tells me that he would accept the conjunction.)

call 'green' to allow us to be satisfied with just one word, such as the Celtic 'glas' which corresponds to both English 'blue' and English 'green'? Which things are similar, and which are similar enough, will be decided by our interests, most of which are not imperative even for us; still less for all climates and all communities. Where, then, are the required neutral facts? If we cannot find them in our talk about colours, what can we expect of plants, animals, work human relations? 'What there is' is different facts, picked out and ordered by different languages—even by different languages-of-reference. If it were possible to establish a language by reference plus induction, the same 'rules of reference' would result in a variety of languages.

It might be suggested of course that, in addition to Mill's Canons of Induction, we should supplement ostension by the whole body of scientific theory; and say, for example, that what colour-words in *any* language 'refer to' is what the language of Optics refers to by 'light-spectrum'. But this unfortunately would merely be to claim a privilege for the particular language of science, and for the 'facts' *within* it (e.g. for a continuous spectrum, without divisions). It would do nothing to establish extralingual, neutral facts.

Of course, there must *be* facts which permit the distinctions we choose to make. And no one will deny that, human lives and interests being what they are, *some* distinctions are all but imperative. We know this by translation. It is also true that we shall find it easier to translate from one language into another, if the two are restricted by similar 'rules of reference' (e.g. if our translation is of scientific texts). But human lives and interests are still so varied, and linguistic instruments so subtle, that, again and again, what appears as one and the same fact in one language, corresponds to a number of different facts in another. The range of permissible choices, *which we have no way of surveying*, must *be* tremendously wide. By switching to different languages, or to different times in the history of the same language, we constantly alter the fact of 'what there is'. Pliant facts far outnumber the stubborn. One has to ignore this great variety and continual change in languages if one is to find plausibility in the familiar assumption of a pervasive extra-lingual order of 'natural kinds'—this assumption that everything is clearly set out before us, ready to be mapped in more or less uniform fashion, by every language.[1] A doctrine of 'natural kinds' is the last refuge of a denotational theory of meaning. Only within the assumption of such a doctrine can the alleged inductive accumulation of isolated references be supposed to do its work. What this amounts to, on closer examination, is just a naïve belief in the divinity of one's own

[1] See Russell: 'fortunately, many occurrences fit into natural kinds' (*Inquiry*, p. 76).

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language; God or Nature is supposed to speak it. The more sophisti-
cated may reserve such divinity for scientific discourse. But whatever
the privileged language, it is facts circumscribed by it that are spoken
of as extralingual, as bare and neutral.

It will be acknowledged, then, that we can endow expressions
with meanings, and even construct languages, by submitting to
what we may continue to call 'rules of reference'. We can insist,
if we wish, that the significance of every expression be vouched
for by some regular concomitance with other things—things other
than expressions. But we cannot insist on simply 'finding' them (the
expressions or the other things) just 'there' ready to be matched.
What expressions there are, and what other things, is determined by
what we do with them in developing and speaking a language.

It is of course, ultimately, some relation of linguistic expressions
to other things that constitutes their meanings. The question is:
What sort of relation? My point is that it is not, and cannot be, a
relation between two distinct orders of thing. The alleged con-
frontation of language with facts, the alleged reference of expressions
to things un-involved in language—this we cannot make sense of.
If we divide language from other things in this dualist fashion, both
are dissolved in a general blur. It is only in their active interplay
with one another that either assumes determinate shape; and it is
this *interplay*—this active co-operation of utterances with things—that
constitutes the meanings of the utterances.

One way of using an expression is to use it as 'a name for a thing'.
But before an expression and a thing can be so used, both must have
found their places among others. This they cannot do by way of mere
'naming'. Only when it is clear that an expression can be used in
many and various ways, and a thing be spoken of in many and
various ways, are the two sufficiently established for the one to be
used as 'name' for the other.

The generation of meaning is not a naming-ritual. Primary
are the meanings of whole utterances—utterances as part of our
active lives. We retain a word as a token, a souvenir, a keepsake of
the utterances and situations in which it occured. The active and
organised memory of these constitutes the meaning of the word—
the meaning with which it enters new utterances and new situations,
adding these in turn to its potential for future use. Every situation,
old and new, is organised by the continuous commemorative power
of words. Words do not confront situations; they make them what
they are.

To be sure, not everything is permitted. But hardly anything
is predetermined. Even under restriction of the same rules of
reference, we are free to construct different languages, different

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worlds. There are no rules for a unique matching of mere vocal noises with linguistically neutral facts. Outside a linguistic system, which assigns them their places and roles, there can be neither 'expressions referring' nor 'things referred to'. With an inductively constructed language of reference, as with any other, for a word to 'have meaning' is for it to play a distinctive role, among other words, and among persons and things; our world takes shape in the evolution of our language.

III

It is when we think of translation that we are most liable to become confused about meanings—and tempted to locate them in extra-lingual entities. After all, when we judge different expressions to be *equivalent by translation*, do we not, in fact, abstract *something* from them? And this something which we call 'the same sense', is it not some separate entity—idea or physical fact—which is somehow related to the different linguistic expressions? The answer to the first question is: Yes, something—call it with Dr Johnson 'the same sense'—is abstracted. But the answer to the second question is: No, the same sense is not some separate entity related to the expressions. There are abstractions and abstractions.

I may abstract an apple from its branch. The apple is an object distinct from its branch; I can observe the two in different places and at different times. Again, I may abstract the shape of the apple from its colour. I can feel its shape in the dark, or I can see its colour with some of the shape obscured. Shape and colour may still be regarded as different 'objects' (though of another sort than apples and branches); I can observe them at different times, and by different senses. Furthermore, I may abstract the shape of the apple from its size, though I cannot observe these two in different places or at different times, and I have no sense which could let in the one without the other. There might be things I can do to take in *size* without shape—say, measuring the circumference; but there is nothing I can do to observe the *shape* of anything without its size. When I say of two apples that they are the same round shape, only the one big and the other small, I do not take myself to be distinguishing three distinct objects: one shape and two sizes. The round shape may be *abstracted* from the different sizes, but not as a *third object*. Geometers, when dealing with figures of different sizes, do not define 'similarity' of shape as the recurrence of some object distinct from size. Shape does not accompany size. They abstract 'shape' from size by establishing a *correspondence* between differently sized figures—a correspondence of points, angles and lines. Similarly, we may abstract his dance from a dancer, though we cannot observe

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it in another place or at a different time, and though we have no special sense to take in the dance without the dancer. The same dance, performed by two different dancers, is not a dancer-less dance recurring. The dance is not *in* the two dancers, but neither is it a third thing related to them. The dance of the two is the same, if there is a correspondence between their two performances. This, also, is how its meaning may be abstracted from an expression. We can examine the expression without attending to its meaning, as we might examine a dancer without attending to a dance. (Phonetics, like anatomy, is a respectable discipline. It deals with expressions in the context, and the language, of physics or physiology.) But we cannot observe the meaning without the expression: it is never in another place or at another time, and we have no special sense which would let it in by itself. (This is why present-day Semantics is so largely a dubious discipline.) The meaning of different expressions is the same if, and only if, there is a correspondence between their uses. What we abstract from different expressions as 'similarity of sense' is a correspondence between their functions. Unless we succeed in thus explaining translation, the mystery of bare and neutral fact will continue to haunt us.

Why—one might ask—are we so strongly inclined to postulate some separate and word-less meaning-entity, in order to account for similarity between the performances of two utterances, while yet we are not so tempted to postulate anything like a third object, a dancer-less dance, in order to explain similarity between the performances of two dancers? Does not this point to an important difference between the two cases? It does. The difference is that it is more difficult to establish correspondence of performances in the case of two utterances than it is in the case of two dancers. We tend to evade the greater difficulty by taking refuge in a myth. Yet, we don't do so always. It depends on the degree of difficulty. This seems worth examining.

When a speaker of what is described as Standard English and a speaker of Cockney English converse with one another, they perform some kind of translation. They establish certain correspondences: e.g. 'a good bay' (for bathing) corresponds in Cockney to something that sounds much like Standard English 'a good buy'; Standard 'a good buy', on the other hand, corresponds very nearly to Cockney 'a good boy'; and Standard 'a good boy' to something with a vowel (a closer one) which is unfamiliar to Standard English—'a good bo·y'. Translation here is easy: the correspondences concern generally a few recurrent sounds. Though the expressions are different in the two systems, we soon discover that on the whole there is a one-to-one correspondence between their constituent

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elements: /ei—ai, ai—oi, oi—oʻi/. Translation then appears to be sufficiently explained by this similarity of structure, and we have little inclination to postulate a half-way house of pure meanings.

The situation is similar when we translate from speech into writing or print, especially when the writing or print is phonetically regular. Marks on paper share nothing with sounds in the air; but the expressions in the two media are of similar structure. We say that they have the same meaning. With modern English spelling, and even more so with, say, Chinese logograms, the difficulties of such translation between writing and speech are greater. But there is no difference of principle. The complication arises simply from the fact that the items which correspond to one another in the two systems are so numerous. Assume that they are words, and there are thousands of them. Nevertheless, since the number of words, though large, is limited, we should still find it natural here to explain translation by similarity of structure, i.e. by a broad one-to-one correspondence between words in the written utterances with words in the spoken. Also, if we discovered two communities actually speaking languages which were related in this way, we should say that they spoke closely related languages, though we should not go so far as to describe these as dialects of the same language.[1] Difference of language is a matter of degree; and the degree of difficulty we find in translation (and in explaining translation) is a measure of the difference.

Two linguistic systems are said to be different languages, i.e. not just different dialects of the same language, if the sounds they employ, though possibly identical, do not on the whole, utterance for utterance, occur in a relation of one-to-one correspondence. Commonly, difference of structure will extend further. It is a common experience of translators that they cannot even rely on being able to match words with words. Generally, the only kind of unit which on the whole permits interlingual matching is the whole sentence. But sentences are unlimited in number. There are no finite classes of them, to be mapped on one another, in the way in which two alphabets or two dictionaries might be. It is here that we tend to despair of the task of explaining the actual operation of translation, and are inclined to fall back upon the intervention of mythological entities and processes to help us out.

[1]In fact, the Chinese logographic script is even less closely related to the spoken languages of those who use it. Such spoken utterances as might accompany the reading of the written words are rarely intelligible to anybody by ear alone. The script is a visual language on its own; to have learned to write and read it is to have made oneself bilingual. It is not surprising then that speakers of different languages can understand one another by means of this script; they have learned the same third language.

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But what of the translator himself? He is well aware of having no list of correspondences to refer to; but his task remains to establish correspondences between expressions of the different languages. He can do nothing else. He operates with expressions, not with wordless ideas.

He will try to reduce his difficulties by limiting his range of choice. He will, first of all, determine the required 'style of speech', i.e. confine his range to a type of context: scientific description, report-age, love-story, advertisement, religious tract, poetry, conversation, etc. Within such a style, he may admit units smaller than the sentence for his one-to-one mapping operation—for instance, technical terms; or he may have to choose units larger than the sentence—for instance, the stanzas of a poem, or even a whole poem.[1] But whatever he does, he will work on the assumption that there is *some* type of unit which permits a fair measure of one-to-one correspondence between utterances in the two languages. In other words, he will assume that, if chosen correctly, such units will show comparable possibilities of combination (comparable 'mutual expectancies', as the ancient Indian grammarians would have said) as well as com-parable contrasts in the two languages.[2] Essential about the chosen units will be only these powers of combination and contrast; what happens *within* any such unit will be less important (much as in translating from speech into alphabetic writing, the shape of a letter is less important than its 'distribution' and its contrasts).

The discipline of translation consists very largely in choosing the smallest possible unit that will admit of adequate matching. But it may well be impossible even to find a normal sentence in one of the two languages to match a normal sentence in the other. In that case, a difficult and unusual sentence will have to do the new job. It *must* be difficult and unusual, or else it would do what is in that language an old and normal job, instead of the new. In the Kikuyu Bible, for instance, 'the Holy Ghost' is rendered by words which, *if* they were matched with English words, would correspond to something like 'white liver'.[3] But they are *not* so matched. There is no bilingual dictionary of metaphors. If the powers of combination and contrast of the Kikuyu metaphor, in its Kikuyu context, are parallel to those of the English expression 'the Holy Ghost', in its place amongst other English expressions, then the internal difficulty of the corresponding Kikuyu phrase stands to be resolved in the required way by those who hear it. The language will have been

[1] Cf. L. Forster, *Translation*, pp. 11 ff. in 'Aspects of Translation' (Studies in Communication, 2).
[2] Cf. p. 209, above.
[3] C. Rabin, *op. cit.*, 136.

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made to provide the required correspondences, as Old English once was, when missionaries introduced the strange expression 'haleg gast' into *their* sentences. They, and the translators of the Kikuyu Bible, might have done worse. Instead of constructing a metaphor or a 'loan translation', they might have left a virtual blank in their difficult sentence; i.e. they might have put a new 'borrowed' word, relying on the rest of their text to determine its role.[1]

We should say, then—the translator chooses *what* units to translate, and he chooses such units as correspond or can be *made* to correspond to one another. He tries to keep the size of his translation units to a minimum. But he cannot, generally, avoid having to deal with units larger than the word. It follows that he will operate with open classes and have no ready map to follow. But he has a compensating advantage which alone makes his task feasible: the classes of matching units being open, he is able to *create* expressions for his one-to-one mapping. This is how languages are fashioned and re-fashioned by translation. The translator, dealing with 'free constructions', constructs freely. He is not changing vehicles or clothing. He is not transferring wine from one bottle to another. Language is no receptacle, and there is nothing to transfer. To produce a likeness is to follow a model's lines. The language he works in is the translator's clay.

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[1] A functional or instrumental theory of meaning, when fully worked out, should be able to explain in detail how this happens: i.e. how expressions acquire their meanings from their contexts, and how their meanings continually and continuously change. This is a task for linguistic studies. The present discussion can do no more than try to discern the general direction which such studies would take.

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