

## *Kripke's Semantic Argument against Descriptivism Reconsidered*

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*There are two problematic assumptions in Kripke's semantic argument against descriptivism. Assumption 1 is that the referential relation of a name to an object is only an objective or metaphysical relation between language and the world; it has nothing to do with the understanding of the name by our linguistic community. Assumption 2 is that descriptivism has to hold that, if name  $a$  has its meaning and the meaning is given by one description or a cluster of descriptions, the description(s) should supply a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for determining what  $a$  designates; and that it is possible for us to find out such a set of conditions. Emphasizing the sociality, intentionality, conventionality and historicity of language and meaning, this paper rejects Assumption 1, and argues that Assumption 2 is an unfair interpretation of descriptivism, and it is not necessary for descriptivists to hold Assumption 2. This paper finally concludes that Kripke's semantic argument against descriptivism fails.*

**Keywords:** Kripke, the semantic argument, Assumption 1, Assumption 2, the sociality, intentionality, conventionality and historicity of language and meaning.

### 1. *Opening*

To refute descriptivism, Kripke reformulates its cluster version (CVD for short) refined by Wittgenstein and Searle. For him, CVD consists of six theses as follows.

- (1) To every name or designating expression ' $X$ ', there corresponds a cluster of properties, namely the family of those properties  $\varphi$  such that [the speaker]  $A$  believes ' $\varphi X$ '.
- (2) One of the properties, or some conjointly, are believed by  $A$  to pick out some individual uniquely.

- (3) If most, or a weighted most, of the  $\phi$ 's are satisfied by one unique object  $\gamma$ , then  $\gamma$  is the referent of ' $X$ '.
- (4) If the vote yields no unique object, ' $X$ ' does not refer.
- (5) The statement, 'if  $X$  exists, then  $X$  has most of the  $\phi$ 's' is known *a priori* by the speaker.
- (6) The statement, 'if  $X$  exists, then  $X$  has most of the  $\phi$ 's' expresses a necessary truth (in the idiolect of the speaker). (*NN*: 71)

This restated CVD is the target of Kripke's criticism. To prove that names are not synonymous with descriptions, as well as to prove his own thesis that names are rigid designators, most descriptions are non-rigid designators, Kripke constructs three arguments: the semantic, the epistemic, and the modal.<sup>1</sup> The first challenges theses (1), (3) and (4), the second (2) and (5), and the third (6). Salmon regards the semantic arguments as 'the strongest and most persuasive of the three kinds of the arguments for the primary thesis of the direct reference theory' (Salmon 2005: 29). I disagree. In this paper I will try to defeat Kripke's semantic argument against descriptivism.

In my view, Kripke's semantic argument can be summarized as follows.

If descriptivism is correct, that is, if name  $\alpha$  is exactly synonymous with one description or a cluster of descriptions, then, the meaning<sup>2</sup> of  $\alpha$  should afford a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for determining what  $\alpha$  designates. In other words, if an object satisfies the corresponding description(s), it is the semantic reference of  $\alpha$  (i.e., the sufficiency of meaning of  $\alpha$  for fixing the referent of  $\alpha$ ); if an object does not satisfy the description(s), it is not the semantic reference of  $\alpha$  (i.e., the necessity of meaning of  $\alpha$  for fixing the referent of  $\alpha$ ). However, for a great number of names it is not the case that the corresponding description(s) constitutes the necessary and sufficient condition for identifying their references. So descriptivism gets the semantic facts wrong. (cf. *NN*: 82–87)

This argument can be reformulated more simply as follows, in which 'P1' for premise 1, 'C' for the conclusion, ' $\alpha$ ' stand for a name, and so forth.

- P1 If descriptivism is correct, then, the meaning of name  $\alpha$ , which is given by one description or a cluster of descriptions, should provide a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for determining what  $\alpha$  designates.
- P2 In fact, the corresponding description(s) cannot supply such a set of conditions for fixing the referent of  $\alpha$ .
- C Descriptivism is wrong.

<sup>1</sup> The arguments are named by Salmon 2005: 23–31.

<sup>2</sup> The word 'meaning' has a wide sense and a narrow sense in philosophy of language. In its wide sense, 'meaning' includes both the sense [*Sinn*] and reference [*Bedeutung*] of a linguistic expression; in its narrow sense, 'meaning' only signifies to the sense of an expression, which could be understood and grasped by human minds. This paper uses the word 'meaning' only in its narrow sense.

For this argument, I accept P2, but I reject P1; so I do not accept conclusion C. I think that there are two problematic assumptions in the argument:

**Assumption 1** (hereafter A1): The referential relation of name  $\alpha$  (or a description) to an object is strictly 'objective' or 'metaphysical'; in particular, it is not sensitive to the facts about our linguistic community; in other words, it has nothing to do with the understanding of  $\alpha$  by our linguistic community. Especially, we don't need the meaning of  $\alpha$  as an intermediary between  $\alpha$  and the object to which  $\alpha$  refers.

I will argue that A1 is wrong, because the referential relation of a name (or a description) to an object is actually a social and intentional relation, which concerns at least three elements, i.e. the name (or a description), the object, and our linguistic community as the users of the name. What a name (or a description) designates depends on at least two things: what our linguistic community intends to use the name (or the description) to designate, and how the community understand and use the name (or the description).

**Assumption 2** (hereafter A2): Descriptivism has to hold that, if name  $\alpha$  has its meaning and the meaning is given by one description or a cluster of descriptions, the corresponding description(s) should supply a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for determining what  $\alpha$  designates, and it is possible for us to find out such a set of conditions.

I will argue that A2 is wrong for three reasons: (a) A2 is a misinterpretation or distortion of traditional descriptivism. (b) We cannot require that proper name  $\alpha$  is exactly synonymous with some description(s), and cannot find out a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for fixing what  $\alpha$  designates, because there is no such condition at all. (c) When determining the referent of  $\alpha$  by an appeal to the meaning of  $\alpha$ , we should consider not only the factual satisfaction relation of an object to relevant description(s), but also speakers' intention, Network and Background (in Searle's sense), all of which together determine what  $\alpha$  designates.

I will conclude that Kripke's semantic argument against descriptivism fails.

## 2. *Refuting Assumption 1 of the Semantic Argument*

### 2.1. *Assumption 1 of the semantic argument*

Kripke tries to disprove thesis (3) of CVD by offering some counterexamples, i.e. situations in which the family  $\phi$  of descriptions corresponding to a name is actually satisfied by a unique object  $y$ , but  $y$  is still not the referent of the name.

**Fictional Cases.** Let us imagine a counterfactual situation. Gödel had a friend called 'Schmidt', who had actually proved the incompleteness of arithmetic. But Gödel somehow got hold of the manuscript and published it in his own name. Then Gödel achieved fame as 'the man who discovered the incompleteness of arithmetic'. However, in fact,

the real referent of that description is the man Schmidt. If 'Gödel' is synonymous with the description 'the man who discovered the incompleteness of arithmetic', does 'Gödel' change its referent into the man Schmidt? Kripke replies 'No', 'Gödel' still designates the person called 'Gödel' whereas the description 'the man who discovered the incompleteness of arithmetic' refers to the man Schmidt, because Schmidt is actually the person satisfying that description, and we make a mistake when using the description to refer to Gödel.

**Non-fictional Cases.** It has been commonly believed that Peano is the man who discovered certain axioms which characterize the sequence of natural numbers. But actually it is Dedekind who discovered these axioms earlier; thus the description 'the man who discovered certain axioms which characterize the sequence of natural numbers' denotes Dedekind. Many people mistake Einstein for both the discoverer of the theory of relativity and the inventor of the atomic bomb. But actually it was not a single person but a group of people who invented the atomic bomb. Similarly, many people regard Columbus as the first man to realize that the earth was round and the first man who discovered America. However, there might have been someone else who is the semantic referent of these descriptions, whereas 'Columbus' still refers to the person originally called 'Columbus'.

From these cases, Kripke argues that one description or even a cluster of descriptions is not the sufficient condition for identifying what a name designates. It is possible that what actually satisfies the description(s) is not the referent of the name but that of another name.

I find an assumption hidden in the above argument of Kripke's, namely, that the question of 'how does some description(s) refer to an object?' just concerns the relation between the description(s) and its satisfier, between a language and the world, which are only the matters of fact, and has nothing to do with our intentions, conventions and customs in using the description(s) and the language. In other words, the semantic referent of some description(s) is exactly the object which *in fact* satisfies the description(s), rather than the object to which our linguistic community takes the description(s) to refer. For example, if the man Schmidt *actually* satisfies the description 'the man who discovered the incompleteness of arithmetic', then the description refers to Schmidt; If Dedekind *in fact* discovered certain axioms which characterize the sequence of natural numbers earlier than Peano did, the description 'the man who discovered certain axioms which characterize the sequence of natural numbers' refers to Dedekind rather than Peano; If someone else, not Columbus, is *really* the first man to realize that the earth was round and the first man who discovered America, then the guy is the semantic referent of the description(s). Though we use these descriptions to separately designate the men Gödel, Peano, and Columbus, our uses are actually wrong. However, I as one descriptivist don't think so.

I can list some other evidence that Kripke holds A1.

- (1) Kripke has expressed a strong doubt to the doctrine of 'division of linguistic labor'.

Putnam expounds that the users of natural kind terms do not always know how to identify the referent of 'gold' and how to distinguish between the bearers of 'an elm' and the bearers of 'a beech'; They have to rely on some experts of their linguistic community who are qualified to address on these issues. On the basis of this common phenomenon, Putnam proposes his hypothesis of universality of the division of linguistic labor:

Every linguistic community exemplifies the sort of division of linguistic labor just described, that is, possesses at least some terms whose associated "criteria" are known only to a subset of the speakers who acquire the terms, and whose use by the other speakers depends upon a structured cooperation between them and the speakers in the relevant subsets. (Putnam 1975: 146)

However, Kripke does not agree with Putnam at this point, because he thinks that 'what does a name designate?' is a semantic question to which there is a definite answer; On this issue experts could not help us, since they have no special semantic power or authority to determine the referent of a name.

Kripke talks about the terms such as 'gold', 'member of the French Cabinet, Minister of State, in the twentieth century', 'elm' and 'beech'. First, these terms have determinate extensions. It is determinate whether or not something is in their extensions. The extensions of such terms have nothing to do with the time of speaking these terms, e.g. the term 'gold' spoken in the time of Ancient Greece has the exactly same extension as that spoken in this century. Also, the extensions of such terms have nothing to do with the speakers, e.g. the term 'gold' spoken in the ordinary people's mouths has the exactly same extension as that spoken in experts' mouths. As for the second description mentioned above, Kripke says:

...the term just means what it does. It may be difficult or hard to determine whether something is in the extension; this is a special problem of what we are going to know. Sometimes we may not know what terms are in the extension, what objects are in the extension or not, for a very long time. But the experts provide no help as far as actually determining the extension of the term. They only help us find out after a while which things actually fall into the extension of the term. (Kripke 1986: 244)

Second, the experts might not be qualified, e.g. he might be only a fancied expert such as alchemist or astrologer. Even if he is eligible, he might make a mistake. For instance, his belief about the name's referent might be false; even worse, there might be no experts who can determine the extension of some special names. Kripke emphasizes:

...in the case of natural kind terms, experts have no special linguistic authority. As Hilary Putnam himself says in another passage "there are just people who know a lot about gold", they do not have any kind of authority

analogous to the Académie française, a special authority over the extension of the term. (Kripke 1986: 245)

However, Kripke recognizes the role which experts play in two kinds of case: (a) some terms come from experts, since they are created by experts and then spread into the community. Under such a circumstance, experts indeed have some kind of authority. However, this is not because experts have special semantic power but because they are the producers of the terms in some baptisms. (b) Experts have some role in the reference shift of names. They can be guardians against contamination of samples by spurious items, which, if we do not watch out, may take over the role of central items and change the referents of the corresponding names. That is to say, a natural kind term, which originally designates item A, changes into another term denoting item B, when the samples have been contaminated. The more experts there are around, the less likely this is to happen.

Kripke also extends his arguments and conclusions to the cases of proper names such as 'Peano'. He believes that, contrary to what people usually suppose, his own theory of names is incompatible with Putnam's doctrine of division of linguistic labor. Furthermore, the division of linguistic labor is even incompatible with some quite correct things Putnam says elsewhere.

...Now, actually, I think the term "division of linguistic labor" contains a strong *suggestio falsi*. I don't know that it is false or wrong because, as meant by Putnam, it may be right. Almost all the connections that I can gather from it, and especially the ones that have been taken over by others such as Dummett, seem to me to be, first and most important, I suppose, false and second, and perhaps therefore, incompatible with the quite correct things Putnam has said elsewhere, even in the same papers that emphasized this concept. (Kripke 1986: 243)

(2) As is well known, Kripke separates two questions: one is 'how does a name designate an object?', which seems to be an objective relation of a name to its bearer, having nothing to do with our understanding of the name; the other is 'how do we determine what a name designates?', which is a social-historic relation between a name, its bearer and the users of the name. His response to the first question is the theory of 'rigid designation', while his response to the second is 'by a causal-historic chain'.<sup>3</sup>

Kripke asserts that a name designates an object rigidly and directly, without the help of its meaning as an intermediary. For example, proper name 'Aristotle' always designates the man Aristotle. However,

<sup>3</sup> I don't think the two questions could be separated from each other clearly. I agree to what Searle calls '[t]he axiom of identification', that '[i]f a speaker refers to an object, then he identifies or is able on demand to identify that object for the hearer apart from all other objects' (Searle 1969: 79). The basic intuition behind this axiom is that in order to meaningfully be said to refer to an individual, one person must be able to identify that individual; otherwise there is a very literal sense in which it would seem that he just did not know what he was talking about.

we can imagine that Aristotle had an entirely different career; that is, he could have done nothing that is attributed to him in the actual world. Even under such a counterfactual circumstance, we still talk about the man Aristotle rather than someone else. Kripke maintains that a proper name is a rigid designator which refers to the same object in all possible worlds in which the object exists; even if an object did not exist in some possible world, the name can still refer to it, if to anything. As far as their mechanism of reference is concerned, natural kind terms are similar to proper names. For Kripke, the key point is that the referential relation of a name to an object is an objective or metaphysical relation between the two, and for determining the referent of the name we do not need any knowledge of the object to which we use the name to refer. After a name has been given to an object in a baptism, the name will be used to refer to the originally named object by all people who hear, speak and write the name, even if those people have no idea about the object. Consider Kripke's extreme example:

...A mathematician's wife overhears her husband muttering the name 'Nancy'. She wonders, whether Nancy, the thing to which her husband referred, is a woman or a Lie group. Why isn't her use of 'Nancy' a case of naming? If it isn't, the reason is not indefiniteness of her reference. (*NN*: 116n)

That is to say, although the wife has no idea of what kind of thing Nancy is, or who Nancy is, she still can use 'Nancy' as a name to refer something or somebody. I will challenge this later.

Maybe someone will remind me to pay attention to the following statements by Kripke:

In general our reference depends not just on what we think ourselves, but on other people in the community, the history of how the name reached one, and things like that. It is by following such a history that one gets to the reference. (*NN*: 73)

Doesn't Kripke here emphasize that the reference of a name also depends on the social elements of language, such as the use of the name by other people in our linguistic community? In one sense, I will say 'yes'; in another sense, 'no'. As said above, Kripke distinguishes two questions about names (or descriptions): one is 'what does a name [or some description(s)] designate?', another is 'how do we determine the referent of a name [or some description(s)]?'. The first is a semantic question about a name [or some description(s)], and it has a definite and objective answer. The above quotation only concerns the second question. If we want to identify the referent of a name or some description(s), we have to trace back to its original use by other people in the community. This is what Kripke explains about his historical theory:

...normally we think of the relevant semantic feature as preserved. That is the essence of the historical theory. A speaker at any given time over time, and even if he has forgotten most of the descriptions he associates with the name of the being, or he may be an amnesiac, still counts normally as preserving the same reference that he had before. (Kripke 1986: 247)

In sum, Kripke implicitly holds that the referential relation of a name (or a description) to an object is strictly the 'objective' or 'metaphysical' relation between language and the world; in particular, it is not sensitive to facts about the linguistic community, that is, it has nothing to do with our understanding of the name (or the description). Especially, we don't need the meaning of  $\alpha$  as an intermediary between  $\alpha$  and the object to which  $\alpha$  refers. I think, this is Assumption 1 hidden in Kripke's semantic argument.<sup>4</sup>

## 2.2. Refutation of Assumption 1

According to A1, when we use a name, a definite description, or a predicate, the name refers to what it designates, the description refers to the object of which it actually is true, and the predicate has a definite extension which includes the individuals of which it actually is true. So to speak, language seems to be an automatic system relating itself to the external world. More specifically, names seem to designate external objects by themselves, and sentences seem to describe external states of affairs by themselves; all these things are independent of the understanding of the names and sentences by our linguistic community. I think this is a totally wrong way of characterizing how languages work.

*Oxford English Dictionary* says that language is 'the whole body of words and of methods of combination of words used by a nation, people, or race'. Here, I'd like to emphasize four characteristics of language and meaning as follows.

### (1) Language is social.

That is to say, language is distinctively constructed or shaped by human society: it emerges and develops with the emergency and development of human society; children's acquisition of a language is the process of how they are humanized and socialized. Without human society there is no language. Therefore, to understand a language, we have to

<sup>4</sup> Hereby I insert some relevant comments. Actually, there are quite many similarities between descriptivists, such as Evans and Searle, and causal theorists, such as Kripke and Donnellan in their conceptions of names: they both agree that there are causal, historical, chains of communication, in which names get handed down from one person to another, from one generation to the next, and they both require intentional components (the intention to refer). What distinguish descriptivists from causal theorists are their different answers to some key questions, e.g., *what is it that is getting handed down the causal chain about a name?* Clearly, it is not just the name; it is the name plus something else that is conventionally associated with the name. For descriptivists, what is conventionally associated with the name is a **sense** (or description, or cluster of descriptions, or way of picking something out); For Kripke, what is conventionally associated with the name is an **object**. Another key question is: *how are names connected to their referents?* Frege claims that there is an intermediary, i.e. a *sense*; Searle asserts that 'objects are not given to us prior to our system of representation', and so our *representations* intervene between name and referent (Searle 1983: 326). But Kripke maintain that the connection is unmediated, that is, names are **directly referential**. It is these points which distinguish descriptivists and causal theorists apart.

consider a linguistic community: their concerns, interests, intentionality, rules, conventions, practice of life, and so on.

Decades ago, Dewey asserted, rightly:

Language is specifically a mode of interaction of at least two beings, a speaker and a hearer; it presupposes an organized group to which these creatures belong, and from whom they have acquired their habits of speech. It is therefore a relationship, not a particularity. ...The meaning of signs moreover always includes something common as between persons and an object. When we attribute meaning to the speaker as his intent, we take for granted another person who is to share in the execution of the intent, and also something, independent of the persons concerned, through which the intent is to be realized. Persons and thing must alike serve as means in a common, shared consequence. This community of partaking is meaning. (Dewey 1953: 153)

Dummett also emphasized the social character of language and meaning:

...language is a social phenomenon, in no way private to the individual, and its use is publicly observable. (Dummett 1993: 131)

He thought that a language is constituted by the conventional practices and agreed standards of usage; so in using words individual language-users must hold themselves responsible to the standards of use of the language to which those words belong.

...of much greater importance to the philosophy of language in general are the considerations leading to a recognition of the distinction between an individual speaker's understanding of an expression and its sense in the common language. (Dummett 1981: 195)

In my view, language is not an automatic system relating itself to the external world. Especially, names do not designate external objects by themselves, and sentences do not describe external states of affairs by themselves. It is human beings, who use a language, that build the bridge from the language to the world, and that create the referring (or predicating) relation of names (or sentences) to the corresponding objects (or states of affairs). The referential relation of a name to an object depends on our intention in using the name, our understanding of the name, and what state that object has in the world; the truth-value of a sentence depends on at least two elements: our ways of speaking, and the existent states of things in the world. It is not the case that semantics takes no account of speakers; on the contrary, it just does not consider individual speakers, but must consider a language community. Any talk about the meaning and reference of an expression is relative to a community.<sup>5</sup> I claim that it is an illusion to regard language as an

<sup>5</sup> In my view, the difference between semantics and pragmatics about names concerns the difference between the social uses and individual's uses of names. Semantics only concerns the general, public or social uses of names by our community, but pragmatics also concerns the specific, private uses of names by a individual speaker with a particular intention in a contain context. Borrowing the phrases from Kripke, the social use of a name involves the 'semantic reference' of the name, but the individual use of a name involves the 'speaker's reference' of the name (cf. Kripke 1977).

autonomous and self-sufficient system, and it is a mistake to investigate the relation between language and the world without considering a language community.

(2) Meanings are public.

I claim that the meaning of linguistic expressions consists in the *intentional* correlation of language to the world, which is built up by the collective intentions of a language community. I consider 'SHARING' as the most important characteristic of a language community. The members of the community have a roughly common understanding of the vocabulary, grammar, idioms and allusions, etc., of their language, so they can communicate with each other smoothly and successfully. Such a community could be large or small. For instance, some digital citizens use special symbols, figures, and expressions to communicate among them successfully, so we can say that they form some sort of linguistic community. Of course, a nation, who uses its native language, such as English, Chinese, Japanese, Tibetan, is typically a linguistic community. Moreover, in many nations more than one language is spoken, so there is more than one linguistic community inside these nations, including bilingual or multi-lingual communities; some languages are spoken in many nations, so there are linguistic communities across different nations. It is a very important fact that the members of a linguistic community can talk together and understand each other. Although the concept of 'a linguistic community' is quite fuzzy and vague, and its borderline is not clear, we still can regard 'SHARING' as its essential characteristic.

Furthermore, the referential relation of a name to an object must be traced back to the initial baptism of the object by a language community. In the causal chain of communication, the descriptive information about what a name designates is transferred from one person to another and from one generation to the next; only informative descriptions of an object acknowledged by our community constitutes the meaning of the corresponding name. So, the meaning of a name reflects our consensus about the object to which the name refers. I will introduce some symbols to characterize the meaning of name  $a$ , which is the collection of descriptions of  $a$ 's bearer: let lowercase letters,  $a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, j, k, \dots$  separately stand for a description of  $a$ 's bearer. Some descriptions are not accepted as true by our language community, so they will not enter into the meaning of  $a$ ; only those description of  $a$ 's bearer agreed by our community enter into the collection  $\{a, b, c, d, e, f, \dots\}$ . Since the collection illustrates the consensus of our community about the referent of  $a$ , and generally acknowledged by the community, so an operator  $*$  for consensus can be put in the front of the collection as a superscript  $*\{a, b, c, d, e, f, \dots\}$ . This kind of collection of descriptions determines what  $a$  designates. Of course, we could have some other collections of descriptions of  $a$ 's bearer by counterfactual imagination, for example,  $\{-a, -b, -c, -d, -e, f, g, h, j, k, \dots\}$ ,  $\{-a, b, -c, -d, e, -f, u, v, w, x, \dots\}$ , in which ' $-a$ ' shows that  $a$  is absent, and so forth. The latter collections of

descriptions of the referent of  $\alpha$  do not constitute the meaning or even partial meaning of  $\alpha$ , because they have not been acknowledged by our linguistic community. So we can't use them to determine the object to which  $\alpha$  refers, at least we can't use them to identify the object to which we usually use  $\alpha$  to refer. For example, we can't use the description 'the man who discovered the incompleteness of arithmetic' to refer to the man Schmidt rather than the man Gödel.

(3) Language and meaning are conventional.

That is to say, a word may be used as the name of one object or another; a sentence may express one state of affairs or another. The fact that a language has become what it looks like now has no *a priori* or necessary logic, but is the result of unconscious choices and conventions by a linguistic community. Of course, such kinds of conventions are not established by way of negotiation or in the form of contract, but in a gradual process: when new expressions appear, some of them are unpopular and not accepted by a linguistic community, and eventually abandoned, whereas some others are popular and commonly used by the community. These commonly chosen expressions can be taken as unwritten 'conventions'. Later, these accepted expressions are refined and revised, and enter into dictionaries or encyclopedias. The entries of dictionaries or encyclopedias become written 'conventions'. However, even these written conventions can have some exceptions, and can be violated and changed.

At these points, I follow Evans's ideas:

...consideration of the phenomenon of a name's getting a denotation, or changing it, suggests that there being a community of speakers using the name with such and such as the intended referent is likely to be a crucial constituent in these processes. With names as with other expressions in the language, **what they signify depends on what we use them to signify.** (Evans 1973: 12; bold added)

...There is something absurd in supposing that the intended referent of some perfectly ordinary use of a name by a speaker could be some item utterly isolated (causally) from the user's community and culture simply in virtue of the fact that it fits better than anything else the cluster of descriptions he associates with the name. (Evans 1973, p.12)

(4) Language and meaning are always in the process of change and growth.

Because the world in front of us is changing, our cognition of the world is also changing. Our linguistic community adjusts language and its meaning to the needs of our practice and cognition. As a result, language and meaning are always in the process of change and growth.

Susan Haack has argued persuasively that meaning grows, which means not only words getting new meaning, but also losing old ones, and new words being invented to express new concepts and discriminations, some old expressions die or are abandoned, and even a whole language may become 'dead'. Such changes may not be perceived in

a short period, but in the long run they are evident and obvious. For instance, we can tell them by contrasting ancient English to modern English. She claims generally,

A natural language is an organic, living thing. Over the long haul a language may, like Latin, give birth to several different, new languages, and eventually fall into desuetude and die. And all natural languages slowly—and sometimes not so slowly—shift, change, and adapt: borrowing words from other languages and from the specialized jargon of scientists, soldiers, sailors, lawyers, bureaucrats, etc.; turning once-live metaphors to new purposes or domesticating them as comfortable clichés; sporting new idioms, buzzwords, slang, and catchphrases.

I think the growth of meaning is much more significant than the recent philosophical mainstream acknowledges; but so far from being, as the radicals suppose, invariably a hindrance to rationality, it can contribute to the cognitive flexibility that rationality demands. (Haack 2009: 8–9)

Based on this conception of language, I have developed ‘Social Constructivism of Language and Meaning’ (SCLM for short) and its derived theory of names—‘Socio-historical Causal Descriptivism’ (SHCD for short)<sup>6</sup>. Obviously, it is beyond the space of this paper to show all the details of SCLM and SHCD. However, I will follow them to challenge A1 hidden in the semantic argument of Kripke’s.

As said above, Kripke supposes that the question ‘how does a name designate an object?’ concerns only the objective relation between a language and the world, and has nothing to do with *us* as the users of the name. For him, a name, as a rigid designator, is a constant function which fixes its reference in all possible worlds without considering our intention, conventions and customs in using the name. But I believe this assumption is absolutely wrong. I think there are two ways to explain the referential relation of a name to its bearer, that is, ostension and description. Ostension is to name an object through pointing to it. However, since a large number of objects are beyond our horizon, the number of objects that can be named by ostension is very small. Therefore, many objects must be named and referred to only by way of description. When establishing the referential relation of a name to an object, we require at least some informative descriptions, consisting of a copula and a sortal, e.g., ‘*a* is a newly discovered planet’, ‘*b* is a person’, ‘*c* is a dog’, ‘*d* is a painting’. Without this minimum informative description, ‘*a*’, ‘*b*’, ‘*c*’, and ‘*d*’ cannot become names for us. Kripke thinks that in order to guarantee that a name designates the same object in a causal chain, present speakers should be in accord with previous speakers in the respect of referential intention. I like to ask some further questions: if we cannot identify the corresponding object by ostension, how could the accordance be guaranteed only by hearing some

<sup>6</sup> CHEN Bo, ‘Social Constructivism of Language and Meaning, Taking an Alternative Theory of Names as its Application’, unpublished manuscript.

sound? What is transmitted down the causal chain of a name? I think that these are serious questions to be answered by Kripke.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, the so-called 'counterexamples' to descriptivism given by Kripke in his semantic argument can be explained away.

**Gödel/Schmidt.** I can reply to Kripke as follows. Your fabricated story is not acknowledged by our linguistic community; your fancy about Gödel is not in the causal chain of the name 'Gödel'. Therefore, we can still believe that the description 'the man who discovered the incompleteness of arithmetic' designates the man Gödel rather than the man Schmidt. When you regard Schmidt as the reference of the description, you have made a mistake. In addition, if your imagined situation is agreed by our linguistic community because of good evidence, perhaps we will cut off the connection of the name 'Gödel' with the description 'the man who discovered the incompleteness of arithmetic', and establish a new connection of the description with the name 'Schmidt'. Perhaps we will establish another connection of the name 'Gödel' with the new description 'the notorious man who stole Schmidt's proof of the incompleteness of arithmetic'.

**Peano/Dedekind.** My reply is similar to the above case. What is of great significance is not what Peano, Einstein and Columbus actually did, but what is acknowledged by our linguistic community. Only those descriptions of the persons agreed by our linguistic community can be regarded as the part of the 'official' history of the persons and constitute the meanings or partial meanings of the relevant names. In contrast, those descriptions of the persons rejected by our linguistic community will be forgotten, or just become the topics of chat, gossip, or casual conversation at leisure time. We never consider them seriously.

### 3. *Refuting Assumption 2 of the Semantic Argument*

#### 3.1. *Assumption 2 of the semantic argument*

To refute thesis (4) that '[i]f the vote yields no unique object, "*X*" does not refer', Kripke makes three objections to descriptivism as follows.

**Insufficiency Objection.** It's possible that the vote yields no unique object, because one description or a cluster of descriptions of name  $\alpha$ 's bearer supposed to be the meaning of  $\alpha$  is not sufficient to determine what  $\alpha$  designates. There might be more than one object satisfying the

<sup>7</sup> One scholar makes such a comment when reading the earlier version of this paper: the above paragraph confuses how an object gets the name it does (a meta-semantic question) with what the meaning of a name is (a semantic question) and with how people know what is named by a particular name (an epistemic question). I disagree. For I don't think we can distinguish the three questions apart. If even our linguistic community does not know what a name designates, I will say that the 'name' has no reference, and it is not a real, just pseudo, name. If semantics just tell us a name designates what it does, and does not continue to tell us which object it designates, or at least what kind of things it designates, then, semantics only says something redundant or tautological, not anything significant. This conception of semantics is wrong. Also see footnotes 4 and 5 of this paper.

description(s); thus what does satisfy the description(s) might not be the referent of  $\alpha$  but that of another name. For example, about what the name 'Cicero' designates many people know only that he was 'a famous orator of ancient Rome', and about 'Feynman' only that he was 'a physicist'. It's obvious that such descriptions are not sufficient for fixing the referent of the corresponding name uniquely.

**Error Objection.** There are two possibilities: one is that the vote yields a wrong object, because the description is a mistaken characterization of  $\alpha$ 's bearer. The result is that the object satisfying the description is not the referent of  $\alpha$ , but the object not satisfying the description is what  $\alpha$  refers to, e.g. in the cases of 'Gödel' and 'Peano' discussed above. Another is that the vote yields no object, that is, it is possible that there is no object satisfying all or most of the corresponding descriptions, because the descriptions are not true of  $\alpha$ 's bearer, but we can still use  $\alpha$  to refer to what  $\alpha$  actually designates, which does not satisfy the descriptions. Kripke mentions that Biblical scholars generally held that Jonah did exist, but most of the descriptions that the Bible attributes to him are false (*NN*: 67). Even so, 'Jonah' still refers to the person called 'Jonah', though he did not do anything the Bible attributes to him. Likewise, it could be imagined that Moses did not accomplish anything described by the Bible, but from this it cannot be concluded that Moses never existed or the name 'Moses' has no referent. It could also be imagined that Aristotle did not do anything that we usually attribute to him, but 'Aristotle' still refers to the man, Aristotle.

**Ignorance Objection.** A speaker/hearer may be totally ignorant of the referent of  $\alpha$ , that is, he has no idea of what  $\alpha$  designates, he yet can use  $\alpha$  to refer to  $\alpha$ 's bearer, e.g. in the case of 'Nancy' cited above.

From these cases, Kripke argues that one description or even a cluster of descriptions does not provide the necessary condition for fixing what a name designates. It is possible that what does not satisfy the description(s) is still the referent of the name.

In sum, Kripke's semantic argument against descriptivism runs like this: if descriptivism is correct, and one description or a cluster of descriptions constitutes the meaning of name  $\alpha$ , then the corresponding description(s) should provide the necessary and sufficient condition for fixing the referent of  $\alpha$ . However, the description(s) cannot play such a role, because what does satisfy the description(s) may be not the referent of  $\alpha$  but that of another name, and what does not satisfy the description(s) may still be the referent of  $\alpha$ . Therefore, descriptivism is wrong.

In this semantic argument of Kripke's, I find another assumption A2: Descriptivism has to hold that, (a) if name  $\alpha$  has its meaning and the meaning is given by a description or a cluster of descriptions, the description(s) should provide the necessary and sufficient condition for fixing what  $\alpha$  refers to.<sup>8</sup> (b) It is possible for us to find out such a condition for determining  $\alpha$ 's bearer.

<sup>8</sup> As a theorist of direct reference, Salmon holds this viewpoint: 'We consider a particular proper name or indexical singular term  $\alpha$ , as it is used in a particular

I can further explain why I think that Kripke holds A2. When he condemns descriptivism on the grounds that the meaning of a name cannot afford a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for determining the referent of the name, he has to presuppose that it's obligatory and also possible for descriptivists to find out such a set of conditions. Otherwise, what is the significance of criticizing people for not doing what is not obligatory or even impossible for them?

### 3.2. *Refutation of Assumption 2*

I think that A2 is wrong for the following reasons:

(1) Kripke interprets the most important principle of traditional descriptivism—'meaning determines reference uniquely'—as signifying that the meaning of a name gives a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for determining its reference, as if it assumed that a proper name can be exhaustively analyzed by some description(s), and the name is strictly synonymous with the description(s). However, his interpretation is misleading. Putnam clarifies the matter:

The amazing thing about the theory of meaning is how long the subject has been in the grip of philosophical *misconceptions*, and how strong these *misconceptions* are. *Meaning has been identified with a necessary and sufficient condition by philosopher after philosopher.* In the empiricist tradition, it has been identified with method of verification, again by philosopher after philosophers. Nor have these *misconceptions* had the virtue of exclusiveness; not a few philosophers have held that meaning = method of verification = necessary and sufficient condition. (Putnam 1975: 192–93; italic added)

Dummett also asserts that,

...when a proper names is introduced by means of a definite description, it cannot be intended to be taken as strictly synonymous with it; it will be subject to the general conventions governing proper names, as the definite description is subject to those governing definite description. (Dummett 1981: 183)

Searle also states that what descriptivism actually claims is that when explaining how speakers determine the referent of a name, we need to show how an object satisfies the descriptive intentional contents in the speakers' minds, including speakers' intention, descriptive features, Networks, Backgrounds, and so on. (cf. Searle 1983, pp.231–61)

I think even Frege does not hold that the sense of a name provides the necessary and sufficient condition for determining the referent of the name. His views of the sense of proper names can be summarized as follows.

First, the sense of a proper name is the associated mode of presentation of the object to which it refers. Only if a name has a sense could possible context, and the properties  $P_1, P_2, \dots, P_n$  that might be associated with this particular use of the term  $\alpha$  as giving its sense. If  $\alpha$  were really descriptive in terms of these properties, then *the unique possession of these properties should constitute a logically necessary and sufficient condition for being the denotation of the term.*' (Salmon 2005: 28; italic added)

it refer to an object; which object a name denotes depends on whether or not the relevant object has the properties associated with the sense of the name. All this shows that the sense of a name affords the way or the approach for identifying its reference. Conversely, the reference of a name does not determine its sense; identity of sense cannot be deduced from identity of reference, since different senses could determine the same referent. For example, the same point inside a triangle can be designated by 'the point of intersection of line *a* and line *b*' and by 'the point of intersection of line *b* and line *c*'. Frege claims that,

It is natural, now, to think of there being connected with a sign (name, combination of words, written marks), besides that which the sign designates, which may be called the *Bedeutung* of the sign, also what I should like to call the *sense* of the sign, wherein the mode of presentation is contained. (Frege 1892: 152)

A difference can arise only if the difference between the sign corresponds a difference of the mode of presentation [...] of the thing designated. (Frege 1892: 152)

The regular connection between a sign, its sense and its *Bedeutung* is of such a kind that to the sign there corresponds a definite sense and to that in turn a definite *Bedeutung*, while to a given *Bedeutung* (an object) there does not belong only a single sign. (Frege 1892: 153)

Second, the sense of a proper name can be given by descriptions that represent the characteristics of the referent; moreover, the sense of the name can be given by different descriptions, i.e. there exist different explanations of the sense of a name by different people. Frege argues that,

In the case of an actual proper name such as 'Aristotle' opinions as to the sense may differ. It might, for instance, be taken to be the following: the pupil of Plato and the teacher of Alexander the Great. Anybody who does this will attach **another sense** to the sentence 'Aristotle was born in Stagira' than will someone who takes as the sense of the name: the teacher of Alexander the Great was born in Stagira. So long as the *Bedeutung* remains the same, **such variations of sense** may be tolerated, although they are to be avoided in the theoretical structure of a demonstrative science and ought to not to occur in a perfect language. (Frege 1892: 153n; bold added)

Third, because of the imperfection of natural language, a proper name may have more than one sense (ambiguity), and there are proper names which have sense but no referent, such as 'Odysseus', 'the most distant celestial body from the earth', 'the least rapidly convergent series' and so on. As Frege suggests, we can please ourselves so long as the same name has the same sense in the same context; when a name has no reference, we can stipulate artificially that it refers to 0 or to the empty set.

To every expression belonging to a complete totality of signs, there should be certainly correspond a definite sense; but natural language often do not satisfy this condition, and one must be content if the same word has the same sense in the same context. ...But it is not to say that to the sense there also corresponds a *Bedeutung*. ...The expression 'the least rapidly convergent

series' has a sense, but demonstrably there is no *Bedeutung*, ...In grasping a sense, one is not thereby assured of a *Bedeutung*. (Frege 1892: 153)  
 This arises from an imperfection of language, ...even there combinations of symbols can occur that seem to stand for [*bedeuten*] something but (at least so far) are *bedeutungslos*, e.g. divergent infinite series. This can be avoided, e.g., by means of the special stipulation that divergent infinite series shall stand for [*bedeuten*] the number 0. (Frege 1892: 163)

From Frege's texts we know that: (a) the sense of a name supplies a sufficient condition for fixing its reference. That is to say, supposing a name has a sense, we could find its corresponding referent; if it has no such referent, let its referent be 0 or the empty set. In this way we can ensure that every name has a referent, determined by its sense. (b) A single sense or partial sense of a name does not afford a necessary condition for fixing its referent. For Frege allows a name to have more than one sense, so long as the senses can determine their referents separately. This means that any single sense or partial sense of a name is not necessary for fixing its referent; even if the name lacks one of its senses, its reference could be determined by its other sense, so we can still say that sense determines reference uniquely. Therefore, when Kripke takes sense as the necessary and sufficient condition for fixing reference, he departs from Frege's original position.

(2) A2 is false, for seeking the necessary and sufficient conditions for determining what name  $\alpha$  designates is equivalent to seeking a complete and perfect collection of descriptions of  $\alpha$ 's bearer. With a very strong tone Frege explicitly asserts that such a task is impossible to accomplish:

The sense of a proper name is grasped by everyone who is sufficiently familiar with the language or the totality of designations to which it belongs; but this serves to illuminate only a single aspect of the *Bedeutung*, supposing it to have one. **Comprehensive knowledge of the *Bedeutung* would require us to be able to say immediately whether any given sense attaches to it. To such knowledge we never attain.** (Frege 1892: 153; bold added)

I can add some other reasons why we can't get a complete and perfect collection of descriptions of  $\alpha$ 's bearer. For instance, the objects in the world described by us change, our cognition of the objects changes, so the meanings of linguistic expressions grow as our knowledge of those described objects is accumulated. As said above, a name and its meaning are established by our linguistic community through a long social process. Only the descriptions of  $\alpha$ 's bearer acknowledged by our linguistic community can be regarded as the meaning or partial meaning of  $\alpha$ . Since the acknowledgement of our community also could change, the collection of descriptions as the meaning of  $\alpha$  is open and vague to some degree. Therefore, one description or even many descriptions of  $\alpha$ 's bearer are only incomplete characterization of the referent of  $\alpha$ , and cannot supply a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for fixing what  $\alpha$  designates.

Putnam claims, rightly:

It is beyond question that scientists use terms as if the associated criteria were not *necessary and sufficient conditions*, but rather *approximately* correct characterizations of some world of theory-independent entities, and that they talk as if later theories in a mature science were, in general, *better* descriptions of the *same* entities that earlier theories referred to. In my opinion the hypothesis that this is *right* is the only hypothesis that can account for the communicability of scientific results, the closure of acceptable scientific theories under first-order logic, and many other features of the scientific method. (Putnam 1975: 155)

Kripke himself also admits that what he proposes about how to determine what a name denotes is a rough picture, though (he believes) better than a descriptivist one; he never develops this picture into a full theory and provide a set of necessary and sufficient conditions, because he thinks **one might never reach** such a set of conditions (cf. *NN*: 94). He asserts,

Really, adequate necessary and sufficient conditions for identity which do not beg the question are very rare in any case. Mathematics is the only case I really know of where they are given even *within* a possible world, to tell the truth. I don't know of such conditions for identity of material objects over time, or for people. Everyone knows what a problem this is. But, let's forget about that. (*NN*: 43)

Why does Kripke have a right to urge descriptivists to accomplish a task which he himself cannot do?

(3) The presupposition of the necessary and sufficient condition for determining the referent of a name is in conflict with our intuitions and common sense about names.

**Reply to the Ignorance Objection.** In my view, it is absolutely necessary for a person to know what a word means before the word becomes a name for him; otherwise, he cannot distinguish a name from a pure noise.<sup>9</sup> For instance, if I make a sound 'soyola', to some audience, is it a name? If it is, what does it designate? Even I myself may not know what it denotes because I came up with a noise just for fun. Yet it happens that someone is really called 'Soyola', though I don't know this. In another case, I speak the sound 'but' or write the corresponding spelling, and then it is heard or seen by someone else. Is 'but' a name? Not necessarily 'yes' or 'no'. It may be the pronunciation of an English word, or the nickname of my best friend, or the name of my pet. Listeners will certainly ask me: 'What do you mean by "but"?' I would explain that 'I am pronouncing the English word "but"', or that "'But" is the nickname of my best friend' since he always put the word

<sup>9</sup> One reviewer of the earlier version of this paper asks: Why can't he just be told that it's a name, and thereby distinguish it from pure noise? I reply: a name should be **the name of an object**; if he has no idea about which thing that 'name' designates, and even has no idea about what kind of things it refers to: a person, an animal, a place, an event, a book? etc., the 'name' is not real, just a pseudo one, being identical with noise. For example, although some person can't identify who is Bismarck, as far as she knows that Bismarck is a human being, 'Bismarck' become a name for her; it is a person's name; otherwise, the word sounds like a pure noise in her ears.

'but' into his mouth, or that "But" is my dog's name', or while pointing to an item, I say that 'this is But'. Only after hearing my explanation can listeners determine whether 'but' is a name or not. Also, consider Kripke's case of 'nancy': I want to ask, how does the mathematician's wife know that 'nancy' is a name rather than a noise from her husband, since he also says something like 'haha'? Why is 'nancy' a name but 'haha' not? What difference is there between 'nancy' and 'haha'? I can answer these questions as follows. In English, 'Nancy' is usually used as a name for a female, but 'haha' is usually the expression of emotion, laughter. When overhearing his husband muttering 'nancy', the wife unconsciously assumes it is a name, because she knows something about the word 'nancy' from the public language. I think, if an agent is completely ignorant of a language, e.g. the language of a hitherto untouched people imagined by Quine, he has no reason to identify any sounds or scripts of that language as the names of the language; also, if he has no information about an object to which a name refers and also cannot identify the referent of the name ostensively, he has no reason to regard any word as the name of that object, unless he himself names the object.

Searle had expressed a similar viewpoint decades ago:

In order that a name should ever come to be used to refer to an object in the first place there must be some independent representation of the object. This may be by way of perception, memory, definite description, etc., but there must be enough intentional content to identify which object the name is attached to. (Searle 1983: 259)

According to Searle, 'intentional content' includes speakers' intention, Network, Background, etc. For him, Network consists of the conceptual knowledge and frameworks within which humans operate. It includes personal convictions, scientific knowledge and social practices and institutions, and it is usually in virtue of the existence of the network that humans succeed in having meaningful experiences or in saying meaningful things. Background is the set of abilities, capacities, tendencies, and dispositions that humans have and that are themselves non-representational and non-intentional. Taking for examples, when someone invites me to 'attend my wedding' I know that I have to dress formally and bring him/her significant gift(s); when someone invites me to 'join a rural concert' I know that I can dress casually and behave quite wildly (and not vice versa), even though the actual request does not include this kind of details.

**Reply to Error Objection.** For the names of historical figures, such as 'Jonah', 'Aristotle', 'Cicero' and 'Confucius', I think, what we really care about is various descriptions of their bearers in relevant classics or historical documents, since we cannot be acquainted with the figures and all our information about them comes from the literature. What is of great significance for us is not who 'Aristotle' and 'Confucius' actually denote in history but who satisfies those descriptions of them. In some sense, what we really care about are the objects 'constructed' by those

descriptions. As for the man who did not accomplish anything the Bible attributes to Moses, Kripke can give any name, even '**Moses**', to him, but the man '**Moses**' designates is certainly not the man 'Moses' in the Bible designates: they are two different persons who happens to have the 'same' name. We care about the man Moses, rather than the man **Moses**. As for the man who did not accomplish anything attributed to Aristotle in the literature, Kripke can give any name, even '**Aristotle**', to him, but the man **Aristotle** is certainly not the man Aristotle recorded in historical documents. We really care about the man Aristotle 'living' in those documents and in our cultural tradition. If later we find out new evidence which shows that our prior descriptions of a historical figure are totally wrong or inadequate, then the original descriptions should be revised or complemented, but these revisions or complements should also be agreed by our linguistic community and transferred down the causal chains of these names. Otherwise, these descriptions cannot constitute the meanings or partial meanings of the relevant names, and cannot be used to determine what the names designate. To a large extent, the meaning and reference of a name do not depend on what a particular person thinks about the name, but on what our linguistic community acknowledges about it. The activities of conferring the meaning and determining the referent of a name are social and historical.

Dummett expressed such a position decades ago:

It is quite as much of a mistake to concentrate exclusively on the historical line through which the name itself reached us as on what we believe to be true of its bearer. ...In many cases, it matters little to us whether the name has been handed down correctly, or whether some mistake has occurred in its transmission, provided that the substance of the tradition is correct. ... what is usually of importance is the transmission of the tradition, not of the name itself....either the substance of the tradition is true, or there is no such person; and, if some error has occurred in the transmission of his (conferred) name, that is not of crucial importance. (Dummett 1981: 194–95)

I want to say more about the names of historical figures. We can imagine that even though Aristotle was not the author of *Metaphysics*, he was yet the person we called 'Aristotle', and so on. The rationality of our imagination depends on some restrictive conditions, one of which is that *all other things about Aristotle remain the same*. If we don't satisfy this condition, the result will be ridiculous. So, I obviously reject Kripke's assertions that 'Jonah' still refers to the person called 'Jonah', though he did not accomplish anything the Bible attributes to him; that 'Moses' still refers to the person called 'Moses', though he did not accomplish anything described by the Bible. I'd like to reformulate a part of the arguments by Karen Green (1998) below.

As a cluster-descriptivist, Searle claims that,

...I am suggesting it is a necessary fact that Aristotle has the logical sum, inclusive disjunction, of properties commonly attributed to him: any individual not having at least some of these properties could not be Aristotle. (Searle 1958: 171)

In symbols, we have:

$$(i) \quad \Box((a=\text{Aristotle} \rightarrow (P_1 a \vee P_2 a \vee \dots \vee P_n a)))$$

We can also have (ii):

$$(ii) \quad \Diamond((a=\text{Aristotle}) \wedge \neg P_1 a) \wedge \Diamond((a=\text{Aristotle}) \wedge \neg P_2 a) \\ \wedge \dots \wedge \Diamond((a=\text{Aristotle}) \wedge \neg P_n a)$$

That is to say, it is possible that one person is still Aristotle even though he lacks one of the properties we commonly attribute to Aristotle. (ii) seems to be intuitively reasonable and it does not contradict (i).

To reject (i), Kripke has to prove (iii):

$$(iii) \quad \Diamond((a=\text{Aristotle}) \wedge (\neg P_1 a \wedge \neg P_2 a \wedge \dots \wedge \neg P_n a))$$

This is certainly what Kripke argues, since he asserts that 'Aristotle' still refers to the man Aristotle, though he did not accomplish anything that we usually attribute to Aristotle. However, this is highly unreasonable! Green explains that,

...it might have been the case that all the things we commonly attribute to Aristotle are not true of him. However, he [i.e. Kripke] never satisfactorily shows this. Indeed, it seems highly improbable that someone should be Aristotle and none of the things commonly attributed to him should apply. What could make us think that someone is Aristotle, but not a man, for instance? Well, we might discover that, a woman is the author of all those books, and teacher of Alexander the Great, but we would do this against the background of having used the other attributes in the cluster of commonly attributed properties in order to identify Aristotle. (Green 1998: 100)

I agree. If somebody speaks that 'Aristotle was a ferocious dog', or that 'Aristotle was a woman', we usually exclaim: 'What? What do you mean?' When we make certain that this person does not speak metaphorically, there are only two possibilities left: one is that *his* 'Aristotle' is not *our* 'Aristotle'; another is that he is not a normal member of our linguistic community, being devoid of the semantic knowledge or the ability to use the name 'Aristotle' correctly like the majority of our community.<sup>10</sup>

**Reply to the Insufficiency Objection.** When I argue that it is almost impossible for the meaning of name  $a$  to supply a set of necessary and sufficient conditions to fix what  $a$  refers to, I do not mean that  $a$ 's meaning cannot act as guidance to determine what  $a$  designates. In fact, just as Searle says, we identify the referent of  $a$  by means of some descriptions, speakers' intention, Network and Background; that is to say, some description(s) plus other factors together determine the object to which  $a$  refers.

<sup>10</sup> Jackson gives a different reply to error and ignorance objection to descriptivism (1998: 208–12). His idea could be outlined like this: for name  $a$ , in the error cases we have wrong description of  $a$ 's bearer; in ignorance cases we have no description of  $a$ 's bearer; However, we have a special ability or capacity to extract some appropriate description(s) of what  $a$  refers to from a certain context in which  $a$  is used, by means of the description(s) we can determine the referent of  $a$ .

I think, in different contexts, it is crucial to fix different domains of discourse, smaller than the Universe consisting of all actual individuals of the actual world, and also smaller than the Super-Domain consisting of all possible individuals in all possible worlds. When determining the referent of a name by its meaning, we choose the referent from the specific domain of discourse, rather than always from the Universe or the Super-Domain. Under such circumstances, only a few or general descriptions are required to identify the referent of a name, since only a finite number of individuals are there.

For example, 'the girl dressed in red clothes' is not sufficient to determine any referent generally, since there are too many girls dressed in red clothes in the actual world, not to mention those in other possible worlds. However, there are only a small number of people in a certain context of discourse. Someone asks 'who is Lori?'; someone else replies that 'Lori is the girl dressed in red clothes'. If there is exactly one girl dressed in red clothes in the place, we can identify to whom 'Lori' refers only by using this superficial, generic description. If there happen to be many girls dressed in red clothes, we can keep talking to give more descriptive information in order to identify the referent of 'Lori'.

I agree with Searle's replies to the so-called 'counterexamples' of descriptivism, and with his idea that speakers' intention, Network and Background play a crucial role in fixing what a name designates.

**Kaplan's Case.** Kaplan (1973) reports that, in *Concise Biographical Dictionary*, under the entry 'Rameses VIII', there is only one phrase: 'one of a number of ancient pharaohs about whom nothing is known'. He says that surely we can refer to this person even though we do not satisfy the description theory in using his name. Searle replies that, since we have some historical knowledge of ancient Egypt, including knowledge of Rameses VII and Rameses IX, we will have some indirect knowledge of 'Rameses VIII' and a perfect identifying description, e.g. 'the pharaoh named "Rameses" who ruled Egypt and came between Rameses VII and Rameses IX', by which we can identify the referent of 'Rameses VIII'. What we have here is an example of the Network containing knowledge of the history of ancient Egypt in operation. Therefore, 'Rameses VIII' is not a counterexample to descriptivism; rather, it is a counter example to the causal theory, because there is neither initial baptism nor causal chain, but the name still successfully refers to an object. In addition, Searle gives another example: I can refer to M Street in Washington city, although I have no direct knowledge of it. But I know that in that city there is an alphabetical sequence of street names, 'A', 'B', 'C',..., and then I can designate M street by means of one description 'the street between L street and N street'. I can do it because I have indirect knowledge of M Street by the Network, not because there is any initial baptism or causal chain of the street. (Searle 1983: 237–39)

**Donnellan's Case.** Donnellan (1970) offers an imagined example. Suppose that all that a certain speaker knows or thinks he knows

about Thales is that he is the Greek philosopher who said that all is water. But suppose that there was no Greek philosopher who said such a thing, and Aristotle and Herodotus were referring to a well digger who said, 'I wish all was water so I wouldn't have to dig these damned wells.' Further, suppose that there was a hermit who had no contact with anyone, and who actually did hold that all was water. Suppose further that Herodotus had heard a frog at the bottom of a well making croaking noises that sounded like the Greek for 'all is water'; this frog happened to be a family pet named 'Thales'; and that this incident is the origin of the view that somebody held that all is water. Then we will face a serious question: when using the name 'Thales', are we referring to the Greek philosopher, the well digger, the hermit, or the frog? Searle argues that we have to rely on the relevant Network of Intentionality to answer this question. When we say 'Thales is the Greek philosopher who held that all is water', we do not just mean anybody who held that all is water, we mean that person who was known to other Greek philosophers as arguing that all is water, who was called in his time or subsequently by people as 'Thales', whose works and ideas have come down to us posthumously through the writings of other authors, and so on.

...in all these cases there will be an external causal account of how we got that information, but what secures reference is not the external causal chain, but the sequence of the transfer of Intentional contents. The reason we are not tempted to allow the hermit to qualify as Thales is that he simply does not fit into the Network and the Background. (Searle 1983: 252–53)

In sum, in a specific context of discourse, sometimes we can determine what a name designates just by one description, while sometimes we can achieve this by a cluster of descriptions. Can we generally explain how many descriptions we need to determine the referent of a name? We must reply 'No', because we have to consider the speaker's intention, Network and Background, and others. Therefore, the question 'how does a name denote its bearer?' and the question 'how do we determine what a name designates?' are both relevant to many social factors; it depends on the interplay of these factors to determine the referent of a name.

#### 4. *Closing*

In his semantic argument against descriptivism, Kripke implicitly supposes that, the reference relation of name  $\alpha$  or one description or a cluster of descriptions (the D for short) to its bearer is only an objective or metaphysical relation between language and the world; this relation has nothing to do with the understanding of the name or of the D by our linguistic community, and has nothing to do with *us* as the users of the name or the D. Especially, Kripke thinks, when identifying what  $\alpha$  designates, we don't need the meaning of  $\alpha$  as an intermediary between  $\alpha$  and  $\alpha$ 's bearer.

In this paper I have argued that, what  $\alpha$  or the D designates depends on what our linguistic community intends to use  $\alpha$  or the D to designate. So, the reference relation of  $\alpha$  or the D to its bearer is not a purely objective or metaphysical relation between language and the world, but a social and intentional relation among three elements, i.e.  $\alpha$  or the D, the object, and our linguistic community as the users of  $\alpha$  or the D; the understanding of  $\alpha$  or the D by our linguistic community will play a crucial role in determining the referent of  $\alpha$  or of the D.

In his semantic argument against descriptivism, Kripke explicitly asserts that, descriptivism has to hold that, (a) if name  $\alpha$  has its meaning and the meaning is given by one description or by a cluster of descriptions, the description(s) should supply a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for determining what  $\alpha$  designates; (b) it is possible for us to find out such a set of conditions for fixing the object to which  $\alpha$  refers.

In this paper I have argued that, Kripke misinterprets the most important principle of traditional descriptivism—‘meaning determines reference uniquely’—as signifying that the meaning of  $\alpha$  gives a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for fixing its reference; his interpretation is so strong that it makes traditional descriptivism obviously ridiculous and impossible to be true. I have argued that, we cannot require that  $\alpha$  is exactly synonymous with the D, and cannot find out a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for fixing what  $\alpha$  designates, because there is no such condition at all; when determining the referent of  $\alpha$  by an appeal to the meaning of  $\alpha$ , we should consider not only the factual satisfaction relation of an object to relevant description(s), but also speakers’ intention, Network and Background (in Searle’s sense), all of which together determine what  $\alpha$  designates.

The final conclusion of this paper is that Kripke’s semantic argument against descriptivism has been failed definitely.

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