

PERMISSIBLE AND IMPERMISSIBLE LOCUTIONS ¹⁾

'Principle of Tolerance' and 'Ordinary Language Philosophy'

In the olden days when foreheads were wrinkled and thoughts profound, the philosophers were rarely in doubt about their proper mission: To synthesize all available – or even all conceivable – significant knowledge into one universal theory or system. The polyhistoric system-builders became, as we know, gradually obsolete and finally extinct when human knowledge increased explosively during the enormous expansion and differentiation of the natural, 'hard' sciences in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: They drowned helplessly in a true Amazon-flood of unsurveyable, isolated data. And their philosophical descendants, totally incapable as they were of coping with the new situation, made the fatal choice of seeking for themselves a small, secluded, still part of the stormy river where they, undisturbed by the onrushing sciences could devote themselves to their encapsulated 'philosophical' problem-and-theory-formulations: 'does matter (really) exist?', 'does man (really) have a free will?', 'what is the essence of truth?', 'everything is really mind (or matter)', 'cogito ergo sum', 'esse est percipi', 'die Welt is meine Vorstellung', 'l'existence précède l'essence', 'the nothing is the simple negation of the totality of being' . . . It was considered 'eine Wende der Philosophie' when one 'discovered' that these alleged problems and theories were, as one claimed: '*nonsensical*,' 'a meaningless play with words', 'a systematic abuse (or misuse) of language' . . . With this 'revolution in philosophy' philosophers were finally brought out of the intellectual dead-water of traditional, academic philosophy and given a more limited but respectable assignment: logical analysis, linguistic clarification, conceptual elucidation, pursuit of meanings, examination of the ways words are ordinarily used, to chart the actual features of everyday discourse . . . This avenue of escape from permanent stagnation was in many ways a pleasant one. For once, it permitted philosophers to perform what they were bound to feel as

¹⁾ This article is a modified version of a paper read before the annual meeting of the American Philosophical Association, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, December 29, 1960.

philosophically relevant activity, without demonstrating their scientific illiteracy, and without trespassing on the cultivated fields of well-established scientific disciplines: They were operating in scientific no man's land! Unfortunately or not: this is no longer so certain. After the more recent rise and sudden growth of such 'soft' sciences as psychology (including psycho-linguistics and psycho-semantics), social sciences (with socio-semantics), empirical semantics and linguistics, this wasteland of the nomadic philosophers has gradually come to be inhabited and systematically cultivated by scientifically more reliable homesteaders. In this way contemporary analytically oriented philosophers, with a study of 'natural' (or even: 'ordinary' 'natural') language as a major interest, are facing a predicament not altogether different from the one which their ancestors, the polyhistoric system builders and other academic philosophers, so unsuccessfully tried to evade. By disclaiming connections with relevant empirical sciences, there is a great risk that modern analytical philosophy shall anew fossilize into a sterile system of encapsulated problem formulations. Needless to say, a language problem – be it a general problem (of, say, the existence of a 'syntax', a 'grammar' or certain alleged 'structures' or 'patterns' of language), or a problem of the actual use or usage of some particular linguistic locutions – it is in any event as much of an empirical problem as is a non-linguistic empirical problem. And it seems preposterous to try to throw light upon – let alone to solve or 'dissolve' – any empirical problem without plunging into the relevant sciences, here e.g. empirio-semantics or psycho-linguistics. – A particularly interesting situation arises, when *p.t.* philosophically interesting problems – linguistic or non-linguistic – have not yet been tackled by the scientists within any ramificulated branch of existing science disciplines. The prim and proper philosopher, then, who insists on an *a priori* attitude, has to choose between keeping his hands clean, at the cost of ignorance on relevant matters, or to engage in empirical research himself. It seems that confronted with this choice-situation, most analytical philosophers, and in particular the so called: 'ordinary language' oriented philosophers, choose ignorance as the lesser of the two evils. – The present paper is partly meant as an attempt to indicate what may be gained for *philosophy*¹⁾

¹⁾ Attempts are made in a paper, read at the *International Congress for Logic, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science* (Stanford University, Stanford, California, August 27, 1960) to show how *social science methodology* may profit by cooperation with

PERMISSIBLE AND IMPERMISSIBLE LOCUTIONS

by choosing the more earthly, *a posteriori*, attitude, employing empirical investigations after the pattern of the social (and other 'soft') sciences, and developing the available methods and techniques to fit within a philosophical frame of reference. However, the main endeavor will be to demonstrate how over-zealous philosophical prudishness and self-complacent 'Besserwissen' prevent philosophers from dealing effectively with language problems and hypotheses.¹⁾

It is today still one of the more obvious aims of analytic philosophizing to distinguish meaningful or, more generally *permissible* from nonsensical or *impermissible* linguistic locutions in order to be able to weed out any locution, X, which *does not make sense* – in at least one communicational event, C₁²⁾ – and *eo ipso* is bound to lead to all sorts of absurdities and perplexities (at least in C₁). However, as we all know: there is, unfortunately, no plain and uniform prescription for how to achieve this ever so commendable objective.³⁾ I shall in the following briefly touch upon three vaguely dissimilar principal endeavors in this direction, all of which are taintless products of immaculate, inspirational, language lucubrations, totally uncorrupted by any kind of earthly, empirical, considerations.

1. A popular and patent way to establish whether or not X *makes sense* (in C₁), is to ask oneself: 'does X make sense (in C₁)?' At least two considerations may prevent one from putting too much confidence in a flat answer to such a question, *viz.*: a) the many glaring ambiguities in the key expression, 'make sense', and: b) the tremendous *individual and situational variations* in tolerance and sensitivity to language ambiguities, as well as in requirements for meaningfulness.

Recent empirio-semantical enquiries – at the University of California – into the ambiguities of T₀: 'It does not make sense to say X. . .,' revealed at least nine main directions of (more precise) interpretations of T₀. Furthermore it seemed as if X was only to be disqualified as '*eine sinnlose Aneinanderreihung von Worten*' if T₀ is interpreted in the direction of

empirically oriented, research minded analytical philosophers. *Vide* 'Empirical Semantics and the Soft Sciences' in: *Proceeding of the International Congress for Logic Methodology and Philosophy of Science 1960*.

¹⁾ *Vide* also: Arne Naess, 'Philosophers and Research in the Soft Sciences', *Actes du XI^{ème} Congrès Internationale de philosophie*, pp. 255–259.

²⁾ *I.e.*: for at least one person, P₁ in one situation, S₁, within one, 'natural', language L₁.

³⁾ *Vide* the author's: 'On Making Sense' (Abstract) *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. LVII, No. 24, November 24, 1960, pp. 764 and 765.

T_1 or T_2 below; whereas T_0 , for the given variable of X , is only expressing a true statement provided T_0 is interpreted in one of the other, cognitively entirely different main direction of (more precise) interpretations of T_0 . T_1 and T_2 may here tentatively be formulated as follows:

T_1 One is expressing a logical oddity, a logical, grammatical or syntactical inconsistency, a negative or positive analytic statement – *i.e.* (self-) contradiction or tautology – or a pleonasm, a redundancy – when uttering X .

T_2 One is uttering a random cluster of words, a haphazard conglomerat of irrelative linguistic expressions or (in principle) unverifiable and unfalsifiable statements, totally devoid of cognitive content. . . when uttering X .

Yet it seems that many analytic philosophers are freely employing this very 'method' with great confidence and apparent success: One simply 'sees' or 'hears' the sense or the nonsense of X . A native speaker, it has been maintained,¹⁾ can never (or rarely) go wrong. He *perceives* X 's cognitive permissibility (impermissibility, respectively) directly, instantaneously, in a flash of revelation, by some sort of linguistic instinct, logical sense or hermenutical clairvoyance. It seems, however, and regrettably so, that different, presumably competent seers come out with different, mutually exclusive visions. Thus, as pointed out by Benson Mates,²⁾ agreement cannot be reached even within so restricted a sample of seers as the class of Philosophy Professors at the university of Oxford, Oxford, England (*viz.* John Austin and Gilbert Ryle). Furthermore, it can be shown that such visions may vary intra-personally as well. For example: the same students who in a logic seminar would 'see' the exclusive sense (aut-junction) as the only 'logical', 'intelligible', 'meaningful' sense in which the expression '*either/or*' could possibly be used, will find it preposterous if they were interpreted to have employed '*either/or*' in this way under any more trivial, every-day circumstances.³⁾ Empirio-semantic investigations have indicated a pronounced tendency towards

¹⁾ *Vide: e.g.,* Stanley Cavell: 'Must we mean what we say?' *Inquiry*, Vol. I, No. 3, September, 1958.

²⁾ *Vide:* 'On the Verification of Statements about Ordinary Language', *Inquiry*, Vol. I, No. 3, 1958, p. 165.

³⁾ Cf. 'On Worthwhile Hypotheses', *Inquiry*, Vol. II, No. 3, 1959, pp. 189 ff.

PERMISSIBLE AND IMPERMISSIBLE LOCUTIONS

logical and linguistic rigidity whenever informants are placed in a classroom frame of reference, or confronted with naive, unrefined questionnaires concerning language usage or the like; whereas in most other, 'ordinary', 'normal' situations the same subjects would display the most admirable, semantic latitudinarianism. – A follow-up study was made as to whether it might be possible to *condition* informants to get groups of both kinds: a) one rigidity-group of logical pedants and b) one flexibility-group of latitudinarians. Of 147 students, who up to then had been relatively uninfected with logic or semantics in any form, 75 (Group I) were exposed to a short lecture phrased with the purpose of eliciting what we have described as a 'logico-maniacal' attitude, and 72 (Group II) to another lecture with what we call a more 'common sensical' bias.¹⁾ The results of these experiments showed quite convincingly that the first lecture (I) sufficed to awaken the presumably dormant hermeneutical clairvoyance and to turn perfectly normal, mentally healthy human beings into rigid, hairsplitting, pedantic logico-maniacs; whereas the second lecture (II) was apparently enough to induce a more common-sensical, latitudinarian attitude. When confronted with three sets of up to 48 sentences, the *logical pedants* intuited, without difficulties or exceptions, the classification of all the given sentences in either one of three categories of impermissible sentences: 1) (self-) contradictions, 2) tautologies, 3) nonsense sentences, whereas the latitudinarians insisted on interpreting all the same sentences to transmit plausible, reasonable, fairly interesting, worthwhile, more or less tenable hypotheses, or more or less advisable proposals.

This outcome is calculated to discourage the predominant, naive-optimistic belief that it is easy to 'see' or 'hear' whether a given sentence or expression 'makes sense' in a specified (or in any?) communicational event, C_i . It seems safe to assume that: given a linguistic locution, X, which off hand appears 'to make sense' (to a native speaker) in C_i , one can always imagine a different communicational event, C_j , in which X is found 'meaningless', 'nonsensical' or otherwise impermissible. In other words: Any locution, X, will always admit of an unlimited set of

¹⁾ For the actual formulations of the two lectures, *vide* the authors: 'Logical Oddities and Locutional Scarcities', *Synthese*, Vol. XI, No. 4, December, 1959, pp. 376–78; and: 'What should we say?', *Inquiry*, Vol. II, No. 4, p. 288, footnote no. 13. Cf. also the forthcoming article in the *Journal of Philosophy*: 'Whereof one has been silent . . .

plausible interpretations of X which make X a 'meaningful' locution, *and* of an equally unlimited set of plausible interpretations which would make X 'nonsensical', 'meaningless'... – Take again the hackneyed example: 'It is raining outside, and I don't believe it'. Not only is there nothing logically odd or otherwise nonsensical and impermissible about this sentence, commonly interpreted: It is raining, how extraordinary! – but one could easily imagine situations where the actual state of affairs would be most adequately conveyed by: 'It is raining outside and (or: but) I don't believe it.' A few hours ago, shortly after I started writing the present paper, it was, contrary to all reasonable expectations actually raining outside. Absorbed in my work, I did not notice; and had I been asked, 'Do you believe it is raining outside?' I would honestly and sincerely have answered: 'No,' that I did not believe it was raining outside. Thus, if a few hours ago I had said to myself; 'It is raining outside while I don't believe that it is raining outside,' I would have made a true assertion. How I could possibly have gained such an insight into the discrepancy between my beliefs and the actual state of things, is another problem. But one thing I know: Whenever I have any such extraordinary insights and feel the necessity for conveying them to myself or to my fellow beings, I shall also feel free to make use of any locutions – how ever weird or bizarre they may sound or look to a pedantic logician – if they only provide an adequate, verbal transmission.¹⁾ By discarding such sentences as nonsensical, logically odd or otherwise suspect or impermissible, we prevent language from fulfilling its major purpose (*i.e.*, to increase inter- and intra-personal communicability) by preventing adequate locutions from being employed when effective communication is entirely dependent upon their availability.

2. Another rather commonly accepted contrivance to secure a swift and expedient revelation of the (im)permissibility of a given locution, X, is the 'method' of asking: 'Can we (say) X?', 'is it *possible* to (say) X?'. The general assumption seems to be that certain 'things' are 'impossible' and

1) Another somewhat more far-fetched type of illustration is furnished for example by a person who has long suffered from a lack of sense of reality; at a time where he is gaining some insights in his own psycho-pathological picture, he might well have experiences which would most aptly be conveyed by such sentences as: 'It is raining outside and (but) I don't believe it'... etc. – 'Today is Thursday and (but) I don't believe it.'

PERMISSIBLE AND IMPERMISSIBLE LOCUTIONS

therefore (?) 'unsayable' (and/or 'unsayable' and therefore (?) 'impossible'?) One *cannot*, or *it is impossible* to utter, e. g.: 'My necktie has a cause,' 'she unintentionally tied a string across the top of the staircase,' 'he yawned (in-)voluntarily (heartily, disgustingly, sleepily, normally, ordinarily, in a standard, paradigmatic manner... etc.),' 'I've been recognizing you for at least three minutes, and I think I am about half done,'¹⁾ 'I promised my chair to stop smoking'... etc. What most plausibly may be meant by: 'cannot', 'it is impossible' in such and similar contexts is quite problematical if not completely obscure. However, it has been claimed that there may be some thin connections between, this linguistic ineffability approach to the (dis-) solution of presumably philosophical problems, and what may be labeled 'linguistic rigidity'. 'Linguistic rigidity' is used to designate certain attitudes to the use of language alleged to be predominant in so-called 'primitive' people as well as in pre-school children. It is generally characterized by an inability to utter certain words or sentences, 'to play with words,' 'to look on language as a word game,' and 'make words mean what we want them to mean.' – Humboldt tells a story about a peasant who, after listening to two students of astronomy talking about the stars, said to them: 'I can see that with the help of instruments men could measure the distance from the earth to the remotest star and find out their position and motion. But I should like to know: how did you find out the *names* of the stars?' He assumed that the names of the stars could be found out only from the stars themselves. Vigotsky²⁾ claims that similar dispositions may be found in every one of us, if we go back to the pre-school age. My experiments with pre-school children³⁾ show, however, that neither children nor grown-ups have inhibitions in playing with words and making words mean what we choose them to mean, e.g., in saying about a dog: 'it is a cow,' or about a basketball: 'it is a bicycle,' – and so forth, as soon as it is made clear to the informants that by 'can you call (say)?' is meant: 'are you capable of making the following sounds?' (i.e., 'uttering the

1) *Vide*: Lawrence Resnick: 'Words and Processes', *Analysis*, Oct., 1959, pp. 19–24, and H. Tennessen: 'Dialogue on Duration of Recognition' (forthcoming *ibid.*)

2) L. S. Vigotsky, 'Thought and Speech', *Psychiatry*, Vol. II, No. 1, February, 1939, p. 36. The Humboldt anecdote is borrowed from the same article.

3) *Vide e.g.*: 'What should we say', *Inquiry*, Vol. II, No. 4 and 'Vindication of Humpty Dumpty', *Inquiry*, Vol. III, No. 3.

following sentences.')

In the pre-text to the above mentioned experiments this was easily accomplished by the following procedure: When the (pre-school) child entered the room, the investigator said: 'Can you call a basketball 'a bicycle'?' Child (*e.g.*): 'No!' Investigator: 'Watch me: *I can,*' and pointing in the direction of a basketball he uttered: 'Bicycle!' Then, turning toward the child again: 'See how easy it is to call a basketball 'a bicycle'? Now you try!' ¹⁾ Of course, one found absolutely no trace of any so-called linguistic rigidity in the pre-school children or in any of the tested age groups of normal informants. What one found was a rather obvious ambiguity in such formulations as: 'we can (not) say 'call, convey, or utter,' 'it is (im-)possible to say (call, convey, or utter)', etc. Reactions classified by Vigotsky, Piaget, Frazer and others as symptoms of linguistic rigidity seem to be due to nothing more exciting than a tendency – among investigators as well as respondents – to oscillate in their interpretation of the mentioned formulations between the following two directions of interpretation: a) 'it is (im-)permissible, (dis-)advantageous, (in-)advisable, (un-)fitting, (un-)fortunate, (un-)reasonable . . . to say (call, convey, or utter),' and: b) 'it is (un-)achievable, (un-)attainable, within (resp. beyond) my power and capacities . . . to say (call, convey, or utter).' The former direction of precization (a) seemed in most cases to be preferred to the latter (b).

Moral: There are *no* limitations upon what one *can* mean by the utterance of a sentence, just as there are *no* limitations upon what a sentence *can* mean. ²⁾

3. The aforementioned empirio-semantic investigations showed *inter alia* that the sentence, T₀ 'Should we (under the described circumstances, ever or ordinarily) say X?', may also quite plausibly be interpreted in the direction of T₁ 'Is it likely that we (under the described circumstances ever or ordinarily) would utter X?' In other words, *it seems as if the frequency with which X is estimated to occur in a certain situation, S, is taken to indicate the degree of permissibility of X in S. If the estimated frequency of occurrence is zero for X in S, then X is totally impermissible in S.*

¹⁾ For the actual experiments see the preliminary report in: 'What Should We Say?', pp. 268–272.

²⁾ *Vide:* Jerry A. Fodor: 'What do you mean?', *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. LVII, No. 15: July 21, 1960, pp. 499–507, and my forthcoming criticism, *ibid.*: 'People mean, sentences don't'.

PERMISSIBLE AND IMPERMISSIBLE LOCUTIONS

When the late John Austin was in Norway, October, 1959, he is reported to have made the following statements: ¹⁾ 'That there are rules prohibiting something from being said, does not say more than that we never say so and so.' And: 'We say there is a rule against saying X, when X is never said.' Ample material from several empirio-semantic investigations point to some rather obvious fallacies in any attempt to reject a locution (as nonsensical, logically odd or otherwise impermissible) on grounds of its linguistic non-occurrence – *without taking into considerations the most likely reason for its scarcity*. It seems in general plain, of course, that if a locution, X, has never occurred in a situation, S, this may be due to the fact that nobody has so far found it *worthwhile* to utter X in S. True enough: One of the reasons why one has so far never found mentioning X in S worthwhile could be that X has hitherto not conveyed, or contributed to the conveyance of, any intelligible statement when uttered in S.²⁾ But this would 'not make sense' in S in one or more of the in S. It is more likely that X would 'not make sense' in S in one or more of the many other senses of 'not making sense'. For instance: The statement conveyed by X – or the sentence in which X occurs – may be an undoubtedly false hypothesis (or inadvisable proposal). And insofar as one feels that such statements should not be set forth at all, one may refrain from making them. The point is, however, that what at a time *t* may seem to everybody to be a false hypothesis, may well at another time *t'* appear to be very true or even trivial. Consequently, if there were linguistic rules prohibiting sentences which at *t* were unanimously interpreted to express untenable hypotheses, the same rules would prohibit effective communication at *t'* when the world had changed in such a way that certain plain (but interesting) matters of fact would be most adequately described by employing some of the at *t* interdicted sentences.³⁾

What here is said about sentences conveying obviously false hypotheses

¹⁾ The report is only available in mimeographed form. *Vide* the pamphlet: *John Austin and Arne Naess on Herman Tennessen's experimental warning: 'What Should We Say?'*. Oslo, 1959, Berkeley, 1960.

²⁾ *I.e.*, X is nonsensical in the sense: X is '*eine sinnlose Aneinanderreihe von Worten*'.

³⁾ Consider *e.g.*, the expression: 'to split an atom,' less than 100 years ago this expression would be 'seen' as nonsensical, as a *contradictio in adjecto*, *ein hölzernes Eisen*. It would, by the same token, be silly of us to ban forever expressions as: 'a rate of speed exceeding the velocity of light,' and the like. (*Vide: The Scientific American*, August 1960).

(and inadvisable proposals) will, of course, apply as well to such sentences which 'it does not make sense' to utter because they are unanimously interpreted to express platitudes or otherwise idle and uncalled for, obviously, undoubtedly true or advisable propositions. Thus if, in a perfectly normal situation a normal person is yawning a normal yawn, it is clear that we should neither say: 'That person is *not* yawning now,' *nor* should we (ever or ordinarily) say: 'That person is yawning.' If such sentences are uttered (under such circumstances), the audience would wonder: Why on earth does he want to say this? What is he up to? He must have some special purpose. What is it that he wants to prove? In other words, the sentences have ceased to have symbol function. Consequently: 'He is (not) yawning' is never, or not ordinarily, said unless there is something fishy or otherwise remarkable about the yawn or we have other good reasons (or plausible pretexts) for making such a remark.¹⁾

Common to all the above-mentioned 'methods' for determining the desirability of a locution, X (within C_i), is the underlying assumption that *natural language* is in a way, at least '*in its ordinary employment*', *perfect and unimpeachable, consistent and complete in itself – incorrigible*, so to speak. From this follows first and foremost that there is no need for constructing *formal* systems of *artificial* languages. On the contrary 'the constructors of calculi' are not only themselves suffering from 'radical misconceptions', they are, with their ill-placed emphasis, apt to avert others from the *Via Triumphalis* of 'ordinary language philosophy'. Furthermore, it follows that, since the perfect and consistent language *is there* to be discovered by the first (qualified?) native speaker that comes along to catch a sight of it, there is no call for broad, empirical investigations of how the natives use, or believe that they use, their language. The chances are that most natives are wrong anyway. In fact they may be as wrong as Ryle was when he reported that 'beneficial actions cannot be voluntary.'²⁾

1) To illustrate and support this general rule that occurrence or non-occurrence of a linguistic locution, X (within C_i) may be due to nothing more exciting than differences in the demand for X (in C_i) – 6,270 adult Californians were asked: 'Should we ever say, "Today I met a man who was . . . tall"?' ' . . . could be given values from 1'2" – 15'. For part of the results *vide: Synthese*, Vol. XI, No. 4, Dec. 1959, pp. 386–87.

2) *Vide: Stanley Cavell: 'Must we mean what we say?', Inquiry*, Vol. I, No. 3.

PERMISSIBLE AND IMPERMISSIBLE LOCUTIONS

An interesting problem arises in connection with the methods by which one native speaker – say, J. A. – of a natural language, L, is supposed to convince another native speaker, of L, e.g. G. R., that G. R.'s is wrong in his 'deviating' linguistic revelations as to whether a certain locution, X, is permissible ('makes sense') or not (in C₁). However, the main crank in this linguistic *perpetuum mobile* seems to be an unshakable faith in (and devotion to) the infallibility of certain directions for use of L, subtly enshrined, one is told, in the 'ordinary' use of L. And as the case may well be with many an unshakable faith, the dough-faced devotion serves as a psychological compensation for the conspicuous lack of empirical indicia: *credo quia absurdum!* The natural *secondary* effects are: intolerance towards heresy, and a condemnatory attitude vis à vis deviating language revelations.¹⁾

Since there is no available evidence to support the notion that 'ordinary' language is really such a marvel and miracle, other empirically oriented analytic philosophers tend towards the meaning that it is a mess, (or at least they assume with Wittgenstein 'the *untidy* character of ordinary language' [*Tractatus*]). From this platform it seems obvious that whenever a philosopher finds it important to propound hypotheses concerning the use or usage of a locution, X, within, say, a language society, L_a, it would be methodologically hazardous to let the tenability of the hypotheses rest solely upon the shaky foundation of one single native speaker's *a priori* intuitions of his own and fellow native's 'ordinary employment' of X (in L_a).

Moreover the empirically oriented language philosopher has no quarrel with the 'calculus constructors'. On the contrary: the more empirical investigations reveal of the 'untidiness' of natural languages, the more apparent becomes the need for more precise and consistent formal systems, which permit one to cope with philosophically relevant problems, undisturbed by deceptive ambiguities and other potential bewilderments and perplexities enshrined in the natural languages, particularly in their ordinary employment.

Last, but not least, the empirical approach to the philosophy of language not only permits, but *presupposes* an extremely tolerant attitude towards

¹⁾ The necessary consolidation of the sect is sought by means of increased sensitivity to the in-group's revelation expectancies.

any uses (usages) of X which may off hand sound exotic, preposterous, logically odd, meaningless, absurd, or otherwise impermissible. In fact it seems that *Carnap's Principle of Tolerance* may most aptly be applied here: In *The Logical Syntax of Language*, after having discussed several examples of so-called 'negative requirements' (e.g. of Brouwer, Kaufmann, and Wittgenstein) 'by which certain forms of language – methods of expression and of inference – would be excluded', Carnap goes on to say: 'Our attitude to requirements of this kind is given a general formulation in the *Principle of Tolerance*. *It is not our business to set up prohibitions but to arrive at conventions.*¹⁾

First, it goes without saying that the Principle of Tolerance will here chiefly or exclusively apply to *the receiver* of a piece of communication. It would be disastrous if the Principle of Tolerance were used as a pretext by a sender for not trying to live up to the necessary level of preciseness, required of him in a given communicational event.

Secondly, 'it is our business to arrive at conventions'. It can hardly be questioned that effective, objective (*sachlich*) verbal communication is dependent upon the use of linguistic locutions which are: a) suitable for some special purposes *i.q.* b) clear (*i.e.*, having a satisfactorily high degree of subsumability), and c) in accordance with some ordinary (*i.e.*, frequently occurring) language usages. *Only in so far as point c is concerned is a study of actual language usage of (indirect) value to philosophers.* And this holds true regardless of whether one's underlying assumption is that ordinary language is perfect, or that ordinary language is a mess. In any case, one needs to know a little about the most ordinary usages to prevent unnecessarily drastic deviations from them. Drastic deviations may mislead the sender, as well as the receiver, create communicational disturbances, misunderstandings, and confusion (*vide* Strawson's use of 'presupposition'). However, considerations of a) suitability for special purposes, and b) clarity (subsumability) will most often, if not always, prevent a communicator from flatly adopting any one of the existing language usages of a given, important, linguistic locution. He would feel the need for: 'explications,' 'rational reconstructions' or conceptual alterations of one kind or another. In fact, there are instances where the

¹⁾ *The Logical Syntax of Language*, Section 17. Vide also: *Introduction to Semantics*, Section 39, and compare sections 12 and 36!

PERMISSIBLE AND IMPERMISSIBLE LOCUTIONS

sender finds it most advantageous to disregard completely ordinary language (*vide*: Einstein's use of 'simultaneity', Russell's concept of 'evidence', Strawson's notion of 'presupposition,' etc.). He 'makes words mean what he wants them to mean'. There are innumerable cases in the philosophy of language where we realize that what we off hand may have interpreted to be a language hypothesis, is more readily understood as a verbal recommendation, as a convention or as any other type of *normative* statement, say, a proposal for how to use a given linguistic expression within a specified or unspecified context, or a general, explicit program for how to deal, systematically, consistently, effectively with certain bothersome *types* of formulations. Most *definiform* sentences may more or less obviously be interpreted in this normative direction. The same goes for *e.g.* many so-called *theories of description*; Russell's, Frege's, Hilbert-Bernays' . . . I want to make it clear that in all such normative cases empirical investigations of actual language usage are either of secondary import or totally uncalled for.¹⁾ They may, of course, shed some light on the *practicability* of a language proposal, insofar as they reveal the extent to which a proposed language usage is in accordance with certain existing usages from which one (may or) may not want to deviate too drastically, But under no circumstances will the *advisability* of a language *proposal solely* be determined by the *tenability* of language *hypotheses*. And surely it does not argue for the appropriateness of informations about the so-called 'actual features of ordinary speech' that the linguistic 'data' are collected by means of methods as primitive, naive and optimistic as those employed *e.g.* by F. P. Strawson in his criticism of Russell's suggestion for how to handle sentences like, 'The present king of France is wise.' Strawson's recipe is, as everybody knows, simple. One merely a) considers a given sentence in which there occurs a description for which one knows that no descriptum exists, then b) one supposes that someone actually uttered the sentence, and finally c) one asks oneself whether one should (ordinarily) say, 'That's false (untrue)!' If one wouldn't, one has *ipso facto* evidence that in ordinary speech the statement concerned is neither true nor false.

To sum up, it seems obvious that there should be no rule against saying X only because X sounds nonsensical, logically odd, absurd, preposterous

¹⁾ *Vide: Inquiry*, Vol. III, No. 3, pp. 185-88.

H. TENNESSEN

to our logical sense or linguistic instincts. And this is particularly the case if X sounds nonsensical, etc., merely because X has so far never occurred, never been uttered before within a given language society. By the same token, the mere fact that a certain way of speaking and thinking has 'made sense' for a number of millennia creates but a feeble presumption of present or future desirability. We need a language with which we, if necessary, can describe unforeseen, unimagined, hardly imaginable, maybe even unimaginable, unconceivable phenomena. On the other hand, language must permit one to express the most boring, futile, idle, and therefore 'unsayable' commonplace platitudes whenever that seems to be important. . . or if one wants, *seems to make sense*,¹⁾ – in still another sense of 'making sense'. It is obvious that locutions are in general *most correctly* applied in communicational events which are the ordinary, standard, paradigmatic cases of their most frequent application. But, after all, what is correctness? As Friedrech Waismann once said, 'I have always suspected that correctness is the last refuge of those who have nothing to say.' And thus spoke Zarathustra, 'Ich sage euch: man muss noch *Chaos* in sich haben um einen tanzenden Stern gebären zu können.'

Department of Speech, University of California, Berkeley

¹⁾ A study of the locution: T₀ *It does not make sense (e.g.) to say X (in S)*, permitted the investigators (Goldstine and Tennesen) to distinguish at least nine main directions of interpretation of T₀, two of which, T₁ and T₂, were such that most informants off hand would say, 'If (but *only* if) by T₀ one wants to express anything in the direction of T₁ or T₂, then one should exhort against employing X (in S).' (For all other interpretations of T₀ the advisability of employing X (in S) would depend upon further informations of various kinds). *Vide*: 'Vindication of Humpty Dumpty,' *Inquiry*, Vol. III, No. 3.