Dummett’s pair ‘woman’ and ‘lady’ also presents a more complex picture than the notion of style seems capable of handling. On the one hand, one can view ‘lady’ in certain contexts merely as a polite synonym for ‘woman’. Yet, it is precisely a difference in ‘sense’ that inclines one to think of ‘lady’ as a mere stylistic variant of ‘woman’. Both are comparable with reference to adult female persons. However, as compared with ‘woman’ – correlative with ‘man’ – which emphasizes the essential properties of the adult female person, ‘lady’ – correlative with ‘gentleman’ – connotes the additional qualities inherent in gentle breeding, a gracious nature, and a cultivated background. This makes for a preference when such things as exalted social position or refinement are involved, to the extent that an actual contrast may be invoked – cf. ‘She may be a woman, but she’s no lady’.

Thus, it appears that the supposedly polite character attaching to the word ‘lady’ really derives from the politeness of saying of a woman that she possesses the defining characteristics of a lady. Although it may be considered polite to tell a colleague we enjoyed her presentation, or to offer to open a door for a stranger, nothing in our individual words contributes a polite coloring, shade, or fragrance to such utterances, understood as part of their literal meaning.

If ‘lady’ is thought of as being short for ‘woman of refinement’, say, it is tempting to think that the true–false yardstick is sufficiently discriminative between ‘woman’ and ‘lady’. ‘Lady’, then, denotes a distinct kind of woman, so that if someone asserts of a particular woman that she is a lady, the assertion is false if the woman in question does not possess the requisite traits. On the other hand, uses not explicitly predicative or attributive in character are not susceptible of direct falsification. This is the case, e.g., in situations that admit the possibility of referential failure. Consider: ‘The ladies at the ball were stunningly attired.’
Or, to avoid becoming embroiled in disputes about logically embedded or underlying assertions, consider vocative occurrences: ‘Ladies, can I interest you in these discounted Gucci handbags?’ In such contexts a referring role is preserved, but the term simply does not fit. True–false poles ultimately provide too crude a device to yield much in the way of an understanding of the meaning contributions of such grammatical categories as vocatives. Nevertheless, conditions constitutive of the correct application of the word ‘lady’ make their presence felt even in such linguistic environments. Respecting the principle of parsimony – semantic innocence – they do not vary in meaning from settings in which the term occurs as part of a predicate expression.

With the French ‘vous’ and ‘tu’ matters are again slightly more complicated than Dummett’s picture suggests. Correct use of ‘vous’ may partly – that is to say, in some cases – be explained by saying that it, like ‘tu’, signifies the person addressed, the difference being simply a matter of the former’s formality, or politeness. Yet this ignores the appropriateness of ‘vous’ – but not ‘tu’ – for addressing not only a single person, but a group of persons, each of whom may be on familiar terms with the speaker. Here the choice is not a matter of politeness or formality and has nothing to do with style or a manner of speaking. Admittedly, French speakers could employ distinct expressions for addressing groups as opposed to individuals, and this thought might prompt us to set aside this particular use of ‘vous’ and focus instead on cases in which both terms are used of individuals. In fact, German does just this, with ‘du’ and ‘ihr’. If this move is allowed, do ‘vous’ and ‘tu’ (or ‘du’ and ‘ihr’) possess different meanings? If so, is this attributable to tonality?

Though there is undoubtedly a strong pull in favor of explaining the difference between ‘vous’ and ‘tu’ as a difference between a formal and a familiar style of address, this characterization ought to be resisted as a general account of the meanings of the respective indexical pronouns. True, both are translated in English as ‘you’; however, it would be hasty to conclude from this that they share a core ingredient of meaning – as second person singular, say – and differ only in some peripheral ‘scented’ way. As contrasted with this picture, I would venture to say that their specific character has more to do with what each is used of; a characterization, surely, that is not a matter of a preferred style of discourse. By way of explanation, one is properly informed that ‘vous’ is reserved for addressing persons either of higher rank or status than oneself, and especially those who are relatively unfamiliar. On the other hand, ‘tu’ is said to be the correct term for addressing persons with whom one is on familiar terms. This corresponds to a difference in the objects to