

Lecture 12

Reference and Referring in Discourse

1. Expressions that are used to refer:
 - (i) **proper nouns** ('Bill')
 - (ii) pronouns ('he')
 - (iii) demonstrative pronouns ('this', 'that')
 - (iv) demonstrative phrases ('that man')
 - (v) **definite descriptions** ('the man in the grey coat').
2. Directly referring expressions, *type-referential*: (i) –(iv). These expressions contribute an object, not a description, to the proposition expressed: 'Alexandra Burke', 'she', 'that woman over there'.

Direct reference is often identified with *rigidity*. An expression referring to an individual is *rigid* if and only if, in every counterfactual situation, the truth conditions of a sentence that includes this expression involve this individual.

vs. category (v): the majority of definite descriptions are contextually-referential rather than directly referential (*token-referential* rather than *type-referential*), e.g. 'The singer of *Bad Boys*'.

3. Proper Names

Their *sense* is said to be the bearer of the name, the object

But: ?'Yr Wyddfa' – 'Snowdon' (coreferential names) .

?empty proper names – 'Zeus', 'Santa Claus', 'El Dorado'
Zeus is angry.

A solution: Russell's theory of descriptions can be applied to proper names. Proper names *describe* an individual, they predicate something of that individual and hence are called *descriptive names*. Proper names are disguised descriptions. An entity is Zeus if and only if it is an ancient Greek supreme god and whatever is an ancient Greek supreme god is this particular entity.

$$\exists x (\text{Zeus}(x) \ \& \ \forall y (\text{Zeus}(y) \rightarrow y = x))$$

There is more to the meaning of these names than just the referent.

Problems:

- (1) The winner of the Man Booker Prize 2009 is an outstanding novelist.
- (2) Hilary Mantel is an outstanding novelist.

The semantic properties of proper names and definite descriptions are different. Proper names are **rigid designators**, their meaning depends on the

object they name (Kripke 1980). Descriptions are **nonrigid**: their meaning can remain unchanged while the person or object they refer to differs with the circumstances.

Gottlob Frege – sense and reference:

Hesperus is Hesperus.
Hesperus is Phosphorus.

sense: concept, idea, the way of thinking about the object (the celestial body that appears in the evening and the celestial body that appears in the morning)

In order to have a correct semantics of proper names, we have to consider the speaker's knowledge and the speaker's cognitive system.

4. **Definite Descriptions**

'the dog', 'Jack's dog', 'the singer of *Bad Boys*'

Classified as: (a) quantified noun phrases; (b) referring expressions; (c) ambiguous between these two classes.

Gottlob Frege (1892) and neo-Fregeans (now): definite descriptions are referring expressions. They have properties similar to those of proper names, pronouns and demonstratives.

Bertrand Russell (1905, 1919) and neo-Russellians (now): definite NPs as quantifiers:

The F is G is true if and only if:

At least one thing is F, and at most one thing is F, and whatever is F is G.

The king of France is bald.

$$\exists x (\text{KoF}(x) \ \& \ \forall y (\text{KoF}(y) \rightarrow y = x) \ \& \ \text{Bald}(x))$$

'[the x : Fx] (Gx)' is true iff $|F - G| = 0$ and $|F| = 1$

The truth conditions of a sentence with a **proper name** are **object-dependent**; the sentence is about the individual named. The truth conditions of a proposition with a **definite description** state only that there is some entity or other that has a certain property. The truth conditions are **object-independent** and definite descriptions are not referring expressions. They are different from the class that encompasses proper names, pronouns and demonstratives.

Referential/attributive distinction:

The architect of this church was mad.

Donnellan (1966): definite descriptions are ambiguous between the referential interpretation, which makes them akin to proper names, and the attributive interpretation, which makes them akin to quantifying expressions.

- Who is the man drinking a martini?
- A: The best fashion designer made these projects of the evening dresses.
B: Really? Who was it?

Solutions: (1) definite descriptions are semantically ambiguous, or (2) their logical form is underspecified as to the reading and we need pragmatics to fill in these missing aspects of meaning. Or (3) there is one default meaning. The non-default meaning is arrived at only when the default is cancelled by the context. Kripke: the referential/attributive distinction is the distinction of *use*, i.e. it is pragmatic (see Kripke 1977; Neale 1990: 9).

Incomplete descriptions:

? The table is covered with books.

Russell's requirement of uniqueness 'there is exactly one F...' is not fulfilled.

Solutions:

- (?) is literally false but pragmatically conveys a true proposition.
- (?) is elliptical for 'The table at which I work every day ...'

Confining the domain of quantification. Cf:

Everyone came to the party.
I have nothing to wear

5. Propositional Attitude Reports

an intensional context

reports on propositional attitudes: belief, knowledge, doubt, fear, ...

Propositional attitude sentences have been traditionally regarded as ambiguous between *de re* (a) and *de dicto* (b) reading:

Max believes that the king of France is bald.

(a) $\exists x (KoF(x) \ \& \ \forall y (KoF(y) \rightarrow y = x) \ \& \ Bel_M \ Bald(x))$

(b) $Bel_M \ \exists x (KoF(x) \ \& \ \forall y (KoF(y) \rightarrow y = x) \ \& \ Bald(x))$

By using (a), the reporter ascribes to Max a belief about a particular, known individual (*de re*). By using (b) the reporter states that Max believes in the existence of such an individual (*de dicto*).

Leibniz's Law: two expressions are identical with each other if they are substitutable preserving the truth of the sentence.

In order to preserve the compositional semantics of these expressions, one has to establish under what **mode of presentation (sense, guise, way of givenness)** the object referred to is known to the holder of the belief:

Frege's *sense*

→ *Schiffer's hidden-indexical theory*: believing is a three-place relation among the believer, the proposition, and the mode of presentation under which the person believes this proposition.

Ralph believes that Fido is a dog.

Φ^*m = a type of the mode of presentation < > = intensions

$(\exists m) \Phi^*m \ \& \ \text{Bel}(\text{Ralph}, \langle \text{Fido}, \text{doghood} \rangle, m)$
(Schiffer 1992: 503).

Suggested reading:

Introductory:

Lycan 1999, chs 2 - 4
Morris 2007, chs 2-4, 8
Cruse 2000, ch 15.1 - 15.2
Larson and Segal 1995, chs 5; 9
Neale 1990, chs 1 - 2
Donnellan 1966
Jaszczolt 1999, chs 4 - 5;
Jaszczolt 2002, ch 7

See also relevant entries in K. Brown ed, 2006, Elsevier *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*, 2nd edition (available electronically, see reading list)

Advanced/detailed:

Ludlow and Neale 1991
Recanati 1993, chs 8 - 9; 15; 18; 2000b
Kripke 1977; 1979
Soames 2002
Russell 1905; 1919
Strawson 1950
Lyons 1999
Schiffer 1992
Gundel *et al.* 1993
Kaplan 1989 (on categories (ii)-(iv))