Referring in Discourse

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Abstract

The aim of this present Chapter is to shed light on some core issues and questions about reference, with a view to how they relate to the semantics-pragmatics interface. After sketching some traditionally central notions within the theory of reference, and a classic conception of the semantics/pragmatics distinction, I then discuss some of the ways in which recognizing the effects of context on reference serve to challenge and complicate those traditional ideas.

1. Introduction

Reference is the relation that obtains between a use of a linguistic expression and what it stands for or denotes.[1] (For example, when I write 'London is a massive city', I use the first word to *refer* to a certain city.) Inquiry into the nature of reference stretches back over millennia, and it is evident why: insofar as language is to play a role in tracking the states and doings of the specific individuals, events, and phenomena which are of interest to us, then referring expressions (such as 'London') have a core, central job to do. Indeed, many take reference to be the simplest, most basic case of a language-world connection; and so, for example, revolutionary moments within the theory of reference are often integrally linked to distinctive conceptions of the nature of language itself.[2] The aim of this present Chapter is to shed light on some core issues and questions about reference, with a view to how they relate to the semantics-pragmatics interface.

The notion of reference is closely tied to the distinction between singular and general propositions (in at least one canonical sense of those terms, defined immediately below). Let us call a proposition 'singular' if its truth-condition essentially involves a specific individual, and 'general' if its truth-condition does not essentially involve any specific individual. To illustrate, compare the following:

1. Aristotle is fond of dogs.
2. Some cats are fond of dogs.

The proposition expressed by [1] is essentially about a certain, specific individual. In contrast, in the case of [2], the proposition expressed essentially concerns only certain concepts, not any specific individuals – i.e., the content of the proposition stays constant, regardless of which cats are or are not fond of dogs in the relevant domain of discourse. Thus, [1] expresses a singular proposition, while [2] expresses a general proposition. (Alternatively, according to another prevalent way of speaking, the truth-conditions of a singular proposition are *object-dependent*, but the truth-conditions of a general proposition are *object-independent*.)

Following seminal work in philosophical logic by Frege (1879) and Russell (1905), general propositions are taken to consist of quantificational relations among concepts or properties. In contrast, it seems that one cannot have an account of the content of singular propositions which does not essentially involve the notion of reference. As such, the question of exactly what it takes to express a singular proposition (in this above sense) is a central and contested one, in some of the debates described below.

2. The classical background, an initial refinement

It will be useful to take as our point of departure the following classical conception of the semantics-pragmatics interface, and to make adjustments and refinements to it as they become necessary. Semantics is the study of linguistic meaning, and pragmatics is the study of speech acts. In general, the information communicated with a use of a sentence may include as distinct proper parts what is semantically expressed (or encoded in the sentence) and what is pragmatically conveyed (or generated by the act of uttering that particular sentence in that particular context). For example, imagine that A says to B: ‘The cops are around the corner’. From a semantic point of view, that sentence semantically expresses one unambiguous proposition; every token of that sentence-type semantically expresses the same proposition; and all competent speakers of English grasp exactly that proposition when they encounter a token of the sentence. From a pragmatic point of view, there are an indefinite number of things that A might be conveying to B, by uttering this sentence at a certain time and place: say, ‘let’s split’, or ‘we’re about to be rescued’, or ‘yell HELP’, or ‘be quiet’, or etc. What is semantically expressed is one of the factors which play a role in determining what is pragmatically conveyed; but, in general, what is pragmatically conveyed with a use of an expression is a heavily context-dependent matter. Semantic competence and pragmatic competence are thus conceived as related but distinct subcomponents of our ability to use language to communicate.

To crystallize this rough-and-ready working conception of the semantics-pragmatics interface: semantic properties of a linguistic expression are shared in common by all tokens of the type; whereas any information communicated with a token of an expression that is not shared in common by all tokens of the type should be classified as pragmatic – i.e., as conveyed by the act of using that expression in a certain context, not as expressed by virtue of its linguistic meaning.

Traditionally, reference has often been conceived as a two-place semantic relation between certain kinds of expression and what they conventionally stand for or denote. The guiding intuition here is that there is a special sub-category of terms which should be classified as referring expressions, because their semantic role is to single out a specific referent as the subject of discourse. (Hence, again, the link between reference and singular propositions.) Proper names are thus taken to be the very paradigm of a referring expression, as names are explicitly introduced to refer to specific individuals.[3] Similarly, this is how individual constants are treated in most simple, standard formal languages – once a referent has been assigned, that is all there is to say about the term’s literal semantic meaning. If a singular term is a referring expression, then its having a certain specific individual as its referent is a context-independent semantic property of the term, and competence with such a term is simply a matter of associating it with the correct referent.

Few today would deny that this traditional picture of semantic reference involves some drastic oversimplifications. Even in the relatively straightforward case of proper names, there is the issue of homonymy – i.e., there are many thousands of people named 'John', and I myself know personally about15 or 20 of them; but nonetheless I seem to be able to refer to exactly one of them when I write 'John loves to snowboard'.[4] Another immediate complication for this traditional view concerns some other much-discussed, basic cases of reference, including referential uses of demonstratives (such as 'this') and personal pronouns ('she'). While it is plausible that their literal semantic role is to single out a specific referent as the subject of discourse, these referring expressions are *indexical*, in the sense that different uses of them single out different referents. The traditional approach gets amended for such cases: here the context-independent semantic property is a certain character or role, and these characters or roles can be viewed as a function from a context of utterance to a referent. (For example, the character of 'she' is something along the lines of 'the contextually salient female'; and so if I say in a certain context 'She is tall', the value of that function might be (say) my niece Erin.)[5]

With this amendment to the traditional picture, two distinct sub-types of referring expression are distinguished. Indexical referring expressions (such as 'this' or 'she') single out a referent via its current place within the context of utterance that is shared in common among speaker and audience; whereas, in contrast, non-indexical referring expressions (here the paradigm cases are proper names) single out a referent via a context-independent stipulative convention. The semantics of a non-indexical referring expression specifies a referent that is constant across distinct uses; but the semantics of an indexical referring expression specifies a relation between speaker and referent that is constant across distinct uses.[6]

3. Referring vs. denoting: the Russellian orthodoxy

All of the referring expressions discussed so far ('John', 'this', 'she', etc.) are semantically atomic, in that they lack meaningful proper parts. In contrast, 'the oldest woman in Mongolia', for example, is a molecular expression, in that it has meaningful sub-parts and compositional structure. The question of whether referring expressions must be semantically atomic (in this sense) is controversial; disputed cases include definite descriptions (e.g., 'the oldest woman in Mongolia'), indefinite descriptions (e.g., 'a man I met on my way here today'), and complex demonstratives (e.g., 'that big green-headed duck'). [7]

I will use the expression "the Russellian orthodoxy" to designate the view that referring expressions must be semantically atomic. The core idea here is that reference is essentially a stipulative, conventional connection between an expression and either a referent or a role; to be a referring expression is to be conventionally used as a tag or label. I name this view after Russell, since he did seminal work in elaborating this conception of reference (cf. especially Russell (1905, 1911, 1918)).

Some such distinction as Russell's (1905) distinction between 'referring' and 'denoting' is crucial to all variants of the Russellian orthodoxy. While referring is a conventional or stipulative relation between certain kinds of expression and what they are used to designate (paradigm cases include 'Aristotle', 'this', 'she'[8]), denoting is a distinct sort of connection that holds between certain kinds of expressions (such as 'the oldest woman in Mongolia' or 'a man I met on my way here today') and that, if anything, which satisfies the compositionally determined condition semantically expressed.[9] The distinctive Russellian claim is that sentences containing denoting expressions in the subject position semantically express general propositions, not singular propositions, and hence this referring/denoting distinction is of paramount importance for the theory of reference.

To illustrate, first compare two possible situations: (i) Alf was the only person I met on my way here today, and he said "Guten Tag" to me, vs. (ii) Bert was the only person I met on my way here today, and he said "Guten Tag" to me. Russell's guiding intuition is that [3] would semantically express exactly the same proposition in either of these contexts:

3. A man I met on my way here today said "Guten Tag" to me.

Hence, the proposition semantically expressed with an utterance of [3] is general, not singular, in the sense defined in §1 above – i.e., its truth-conditions are not essentially tied to anyone in particular. Next, compare these two situations: (i) Alice is the oldest woman in Mongolia, and she is 117 years old, vs. (ii) Betty is the oldest woman in Mongolia, and she is 117 years old. The Russellian orthodoxy has it that, as above, [4] would semantically express exactly the same proposition in either of these contexts:

4. The oldest woman in Mongolia is 117 years old.

Again, according to Russell, the truth-conditions of [4] are object-independent – i.e., not essentially tied to anyone in particular. Hence, the propositions semantically expressed by sentences containing definite descriptions, too, are general, not singular. Semantically speaking, they specifically concern only concepts or properties, and so do not instance reference to any particular individuals.

According to the Russellian orthodoxy, then: Denoting is a quantificational relation, having to do with the satisfaction of compositionally determined, semantically specified properties. Reference, in contrast, is simple, basic, semantically atomic, and conventional or stipulative. For example, Neale (1993: 104) contains a relatively recent elaboration and defense of this point of view:

> [Reference] is an arbitrary relation that holds between a symbol and an individual, and as soon as one invokes a constructive or compositional procedure for determining the semantical value of an expression, one is no longer engaged in trying to establish reference. If an NP has any intern al structure it is to be accorded a nonreferential treatment (though of course some of its parts may be referential).[10]

As alluded to in note 8, many specific details of Russell's theory of reference have come to be widely rejected – particularly the respects in which epistemology and semantics are irredeemably conflated in some corners of Russell's thought. Two important refinements to the Russellian orthodoxy occurred in the latter-twentieth century. One was the coupling of Russell's referring/denoting distinction with a more sophisticated theory of reference, the causal-historical theory of reference, in the 1960s and 70s;[11] but a discussion of that refinement lies beyond the scope of this present article. The second was Grice's (1989) recognition of the importance of the semantics/pragmatics distinction for issues in the theory of reference (and elsewhere throughout the philosophy of language), and his application of this refinement to Strawson's important challenge to the Russellian orthodoxy. Let us now turn to Strawson's challenge.

4. Speaker's reference: Strawson's challenge

Strawson (1950) is a seminal statement of a central challenge to the Russellian orthodoxy, in which he argues that: "Referring is not something that an expression does; it is something that someone can use an expression to do". The allegation has it that the homonymy of names and the prevalence of indexicality (as catalogued above in §2) are just the thin end of the wedge, when it comes to drastic oversimplifications inherent within the Russellian orthodoxy. All manner of terms are routinely used to refer to things which no semantic theory would classify as their literal semantic referent, as the terms italicized in the following sentence might be thought to illustrate:

5. *The book* is on *the table*.

In such cases, the speaker may well be intending to use the italicized molecular expressions to single out a specific referent, and to express a proposition whose truth-conditions essentially involves that specific individual; but in no such case is there any tight constitutive relation between the literal semantic meaning of the term and the particular intended referent. Here we have instances of terms which do not obviously belong in the traditional category that includes the likes of 'John' and 'she', but which seem to be used referentially, in the course of expressing singular propositions.

And note well that Strawson's point is not merely a technical one, fussing over particular details of Russell's theory of the semantics of definite descriptions. Rather, Strawson's challenge has the potential to be a drastic blow to traditional conceptions of semantic reference, and to related conceptions of the semantics-pragmatics interface, outlined in §2 above. Whether a proposition should be classified as singular or general, according to Strawson, is simply not determined by any context-independent semantic properties of the linguistic expressions involved. It entirely depends on the speaker's context-specific communicative intentions. Relatedly, Strawson calls into question the very idea that there exists some privileged sub-class of singular terms, the referring expressions, with some kind of exclusive hold on the expression of singular propositions.

Proponents of Strawson's challenge conclude that it is a hopeless oversimplification to view reference as a two-place semantic relation between an expression and a referent. Instead, reference is irreducibly a four-place, context-dependent relation: a speaker (i) uses an expression (ii) to refer an audience (iii) to a referent (iv). Speaker's reference is the fundamental notion, when it comes to providing a theoretical account of linguistic communication; any plausible theory can only define 'reference' or 'referring expression' in terms of regularities over such individual referential intentions. To the extent that any theorists run afoul of this, they are spending too much time thinking about formal languages, and their theories do not apply to natural languages.

To sum up, then: Strawson (as well as many others, who are sometimes called 'ordinary language', or 'communication-intention', theorists) holds that it is the use, not the expression, which is the primary bearer of semantic properties. Hence, the very idea of reference as a context-independent semantic property is drastically wrong-headed, and much of what traditionally had been classified under the theory of reference belongs within the study of pragmatics, not semantics.

5. Defending the Russellian orthodoxy

It can hardly be contested that speakers often intend to express singular propositions about the subject of discourse, when employing various kinds of molecular designators – such as definite descriptions (e.g., 'the oldest woman in Mongolia'), indefinite descriptions (e.g., 'a man I met on my way here today'), and complex demonstratives (e.g., 'that big green-headed duck'). What is controversial is the question of exactly what relevance that phenomenon should be taken to have for the theory of reference. One factor which complicates the controversy is that it is interwoven with related controversies regarding contrasting theoretical accounts of the semantics-pragmatics interface.

Following especially Grice (1989) and Kripke (1977), the orthodox Russellian response to Strawson's challenge is not to conclude that speaker's reference replaces semantic reference, or that there is no such thing as semantic reference; but rather, to conclude that it is crucial to attend carefully to the distinction between speaker's reference and semantic reference. Rather than junking the traditional semantics-pragmatics interface, to the contrary, the orthodox Russellian strategy begins from a refinement to the traditional conception of it – i.e., the distinction between speaker's meaning and semantic meaning.

The idea is that we can build a coherent and plausible account of the data entirely from what Kripke (1977: 263) calls 'a general theory of speech acts', without committing to anything to which we were not already committed before we noticed the phenomenon of referential uses of molecular expressions. The need for the distinction between speaker's meaning and semantic meaning has long been evident (cf, Grice (1957)); and it suffices to ground an ample explanation for how one might not need to employ a referring expression to express a singular proposition. Consider again:

5. The book is on the table.

The Russellians' claim is that what an utterance of [5] semantically expresses is the general proposition that there is exactly one book and exactly one table (in the relevant restricted domain of discourse[12]) and that the former is on the latter. To use this sentence literally, strictly speaking, is to use it to express this general proposition. In such cases, the speaker's meaning is identical to the semantic meaning.

Now, a speaker may well utter [5] with the intention to express a singular proposition, essentially involving a specific book (and/or table), as opposed to merely denoting whichever book happens to be about (across modal and/or temporal contexts); but speech act theory affords the means to accommodate this phenomenon. Like any sentence, [5] can be used to speaker-mean (i.e., communicate in a one-off, context-dependent fashion) something distinct from its semantic meaning. Of course, unlike any sentence, sentences like [5] especially lend themselves to referential uses, precisely because definite descriptions denote exactly one individual. When one wants to express a singular proposition about some unnamed individual, or about an individual whose name is not mutually known among present interlocutors, definite descriptions are often the best means available. Nonetheless, the definite description's one univocal, quantificational semantics is still evident and operative on referential uses.[13] These denoting phrases (along with many others, such as 'a man I met yesterday' or 'three thugs') are especially suited to the distinctive kind of non-literal speaker meaning that Kripke (1977) calls 'speaker reference'.[14]

Hence, for another example, the semantics of [4] is constant, whether the speaker has in mind Alice, Betty, or no one in particular:

[4] The oldest woman in Mongolia is 117 years old.

In context, such constructions may be used to communicate a singular proposition, but they do not semantically express singular propositions, nor do they undermine the entire theoretical basis for such traditional semantic distinctions.

So, then: As Grice and Kripke develop, the distinction between speaker's reference and semantic reference is a specific instance of the more general distinction between speaker's meaning and semantic meaning, and it affords a way to accommodate Strawson's challenge with only minimal refinements to traditional conceptions of reference and the semantics-pragmatics interface. Semantic reference should still be viewed as an atomic, context-independent semantic property; but when speakers use molecular expressions with the intention of singling out a specific topic of discourse and expressing a singular proposition, here we have a case of speaker reference, not semantic reference. Hence, refinements in the course of the development of pragmatics might be brought to bear in saving a recognizably traditional conception of the division of labor between semantics and pragmatics.[15]

6. Extending Strawson's challenge

Despite those developments, though, dissatisfaction with the Russellian orthodoxy lives on, and has evolved into various sub-varieties. Strawson (1971) himself flamboyantly described a central fissure in twentieth-century philosophy of language as a great 'Homeric struggle'. On the one hand, there is what Strawson calls the 'formal-semantics tradition', which conceives of the semantic enterprise as a matter of pairing well-formed sentences with (context-independent) truth-conditions, and among whose ranks one tends to find the upholders of the Russellian orthodoxy. On the other hand, there is what Strawson calls the 'communication-intention tradition', whose proponents hold that truth-conditions, in general, are simply not determined by any context-independent semantic properties of the linguistic expressions involved. (Relatedly, they hold that, along with the pernicious myth of semantic reference, so crumbles the very idea of a clean split between semantics and pragmatics.) While in many respects, these traditions have been synthesized (cf. Grice (1989), Kaplan (2004)), still many such disputes in lexical semantics, pragmatics, and more generally throughout the philosophy of language might be profitably viewed as flare-ups within this classic overarching debate concerning whether semantic meaning determines, or underdetermines, truth-conditions.

Approached down this avenue, the varieties of semantic contextualism are a noteworthy descendent of Strawson's challenge.[16] Contextualists, akin to the communication-intention theorists, attach great significance to the complex, dynamic adaptability of our linguistic behavior, and tend to hold that formal semantic theories are not terribly relevant to our unreflective, everyday communicative exchanges. Among the many strands of contextualist lines of argument against traditional conceptions of the semantic enterprise, *semantic underdetermination* arguments are particularly pertinent to this general discussion. Contextualists' undetermination arguments are built upon mundane, ubiquitous cases in which semantic meaning falls well short of what we would intuitively characterize as the proposition expressed (with a use of a sentence). In some cases, semantic meaning does not seem to suffice to constitute truth-evaluable content (e.g., 'Jill is ready'); in other cases, literal semantic meaning seems to inappropriately specify the proposition expressed (e.g., 'I have had nothing to eat'). A formal semanticist might dismiss such cases as loose talk – as merely leaving the obvious unsaid, for the sake of convenience – but it seems that even an otherwise completed, neither vague nor ambiguous sentence (e.g., 'John finished Sally's book') can be used to express an indefinite number of distinct propositions (e.g., John finished binding the book that Sally wrote; John finished reading the book that Sally recommended for their book club; John finished writing the book that he dedicated to Sally; etc. etc.). Contextualists take the kind of creative, supplementary interpretive process which Recanati (2004) calls 'free enrichment' to be the norm, not a peripheral and circumscribed oddball. (E.g., when we hear 'She took out her key and opened the door', we take the sentence to assert that she opened the door *with* the key.) And then there is the wealth of convergent data cataloguing the extent to which the lexicon is adaptable, malleable – that linguistic interpretation requires constantly shrinking or expanding the senses of words to fit the context at hand.[17]

The general upshot, according to contextualists, is that traditional conceptions of the semantics-pragmatics interface are simply untenable, because all linguistic communication is thoroughly permeated by pragmatic interpretive processes. The common further *ad hominem* point has it that widespread blindness to this evident fact is attributable to theoreticians' tending to spend too much time thinking about formal languages, and not enough time talking to people.

So, there has also been considerable growth and development, when it comes to Strawson's challenge to the very idea of reference as a two-place (context-independent) relation, and its attendant conception of the semantics/pragmatics interface. (Indeed, the contextualists' challenges to the very idea of semantic meaning would also go some way toward undercutting the Grice-Kripke Russellian orthodox response to Strawson, as the orthodox response clearly seems to presuppose a (more or less) determinate notion of semantic meaning.) On many particular fronts, Strawson's Homeric struggles still endure, over the extent to which literal semantic meaning determines truth-conditions, and over what effects any specific resolution of that battle would have on such things as semantic reference.

7. Summing up: Context and reference

One central, general question, then, is: Is reference a two-place, context-independent relation? Until well into the twentieth century, anyone who cared about the question had assumed so – and so the most divisive debates in the theory of reference had to do with Millian (1843) direct reference theories vs. Fregean (1892) indirect reference theories (which are now generally acknowledged to have a lot more to do with *content* than with reference, *per se*)[18]. However, for decades now it has been evident that there are various and varied ways in which context affects reference, and this recognition forces a thorough re-evaluation of such traditional presumptions.

For one thing (§2), there is the phenomenon of indexicality, which necessitates the recognition of a distinct class of indexical or perspectival referring expressions (e.g., ‘this’, ‘she’). For these sorts of cases, some such distinction as Kaplan’s (1989) character/content distinction is essential for understanding the ways in which context affects reference. Then (§4) there is the phenomenon of speaker’s reference – i.e., uses of terms which do not obviously belong in the traditional category of referring expressions, but which seem to be referential, in that they are used to single out the subject of discourse and express a singular proposition. At a minimum, recognizing the prevalence of speaker’s reference necessitates some further refinements to classical notions of semantic reference, and to traditional conceptions of the division of labor between semantics and pragmatics. When it comes to the more ominous challenge of semantic underdetermination (§6) – more ominous because it is so pervasive – here the floodgates may well spill open, one result being that context-specific pragmatic interpretive processes are taken as essential ingredients constitutive of any instance of reference in natural language.

Semantic reference is a significant battleground in that general, theoretical debate; and the Russellian orthodoxy is working hard toward resisting that latter challenge. So, on the one hand, there are those who think that the two-place relation of semantic reference is the most fundamental notion of reference in a systematic theory of linguistic communication, and that it provides the necessary intentional language-world content, upon which all more sophisticated speech acts depend. For these theorists – whom I have been calling ‘orthodox’, and whom Strawson calls ‘formal semanticists’ – context-dependent pragmatic considerations have no relevance to the drawing of meaning distinctions. On the other hand, there are those who find that above line of thought to commit a hopeless theoretical abstraction, resulting in theories of linguistic communication which are of limited scope and questionable relevance. This camp runs from the ordinary language philosophers to the semantic contextualists, and they hold that unless pragmatic considerations are taken to play a constitutive role in the drawing of meaning distinctions, then we have a theory that only applies to toy formal languages, not to human natural language.

Referring in discourse is thoroughly context-dependent, in that all parties concede that what Kripke (1977) calls ‘speaker’s reference’ is a prevalent phenomenon. Virtually any linguistic expression could be used as a device of speaker-reference. However, the exact sense in which referring in discourse is context-dependent is deeply contested. As we have seen, that question is integrally tied, in complex ways, with contrasting theoretical stances on the semantics/pragmatics distinction (i.e., the very idea that we can cleanly distinguish between what is encoded in the sentence vs. what generated by the act of uttering that particular sentence in that particular context).)

[1] Note that there are some significant differences of usage when it comes to the range of applicability of the term ‘reference’. In its strictest sense, ‘reference’ applies only to the relation between singular terms (such as proper names and pronouns) and what they are used to single out. On this usage, whatever the semantic relations are, precisely, that are involved in, say, predicates (‘is tall’) or adverbs (‘slowly’), they are distinct from reference. In a broader sense of the term ‘reference’, any expression that makes a difference to the truth-conditions of sentences in which it occurs thereby has a referent – and so, for example, predicates refer to properties. In the former, strict sense of the term, the theory of reference is more or less co-extensive with the study of the meaning and use of singular terms, while in the latter, broad sense, the business of the theory of reference is to assign semantic values to all independently meaningful expressions.

[2] Here compare the contrastive views of reference developed by Frege (1892) vs. Kripke (1972); and see Kaplan (1989: Part IV) for a discussion of the differing underlying conceptions of language.

[3] The culmination of this line of thought is the Millian (1843) view of the semantics of proper names, according to which names are connotationless tags.

[4] See Kaplan (1990) for discussion of this issue.

[5] Kaplan (1989) and Perry (2001) are seminal discussions of indexicality as it pertains to the theory of reference.

[6] This explanation of the distinction relies heavily on Perry (2001) and Neale (2008).

[7] Space does not permit me to get into the question of whether complex demonstratives should be classified as referring or denoting expressions. See Neale (2008) for a recent discussion.

[8] This list constitutes a departure from Russell. (For instance, Russell (1911) argues that one can only refer to the sense data and universals with which one is acquainted.) While I follow Russell in giving central importance to the referring/denoting distinction, I (along with everyone else) reject Russell’s strict notion of acquaintance as a necessary condition for reference.

[9] Russell’s term ‘denoting’ will seem a bit dated, especially to linguists. (Cf. Kaplan (2005: 940): ‘Linguists call these phrases *determiner phrases* because of their syntactic structure; they are constructed from *determiners*. Russell called them *denoting phrases* because of their semantical property; they are phrases that denote.’) I will stick with Russell’s term. Suppose I met exactly one man on the way here today, and call him ‘Alf’. *Denoting* is the relation that obtains between, on the one hand, Alf, and, on the other hand, such expressions as ‘a man I met on the way here today’ or ‘the man I met on the way here today’.

[10] Cf. Neale (1994) for discussion of the ways in which this conception of reference relates to certain theses in theoretical syntax – e.g., on p.822, ‘a phrase can occupy an argument position at LF only if its semantical value is wholly determined by a single axiom, i.e. only if it is semantically atomic’ – and Neale (2008) for further general discussion of related issues.

[11] Kripke (1972) and Donnellan (1972) are the principle exponents on this front.

[12] Here I scurry past massive and difficult questions in the philosophy of language, which concern the correct theoretical description of contextual domain restriction. For example, what exactly determine precise truth-conditions for utterances of ‘*There is* no coffee left’ or ‘*Everyone* has arrived’? For discussion see Stanley and Szabo (2000), and the responses by Bach (2000) and Neale (2000).

[13] See Bach (2004: 201-4). Note especially Bach’s discussion at pp. 203, 222 of the exact senses in which referential uses should be categorized as non-literal.

[14] Cf. Neale (1990: 88). To borrow a nice parallel case from Bach (2004: 203), the expression ‘three thugs’ may be well-suited to the expression of a singular proposition—e.g., ‘On my way over here, three thugs attacked me and

stole my wallet'—but nonetheless 'three thugs' is not semantically ambiguous between its standard quantificational reading and, on the other hand, a referring expression which designates the three specific guys who assaulted me.

[15] For further developments and refinements of the Russellian orthodox strategy, cf. Neale (1990; 2004), Bach (2004).

[16] Cf. Recanati (2004) for discussion and references.

[17] Travis (1975) and Searle (1978) are influential sources for this point in philosophy; both acknowledge debts to the ordinary language tradition. For some current research informed by both philosophy and linguistics, see Carston's Lexical Pragmatics Project, online at http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/lexprag/.

[18] Cf. Kaplan (1989), Bach (2004) for discussion.