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Speakers, addressees and the referential process: a pragmatic approach

[running head: **Speakers, addressees and the referential process**]

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In pragmatics, reference is defined by Abbott (2010: 2) as “the three-place relation that holds when speaker *x* uses expression *y* to identify entity *z*.” This is the everyday definition of the verb *refer*, as in “When you said ‘that jerk from the Dean’s office,’ who were you referring to?” (ibid.). In this approach, the relation between an expression and a referent “is essentially controlled by the referential intentions of the speaker” (Gunkel et al. 2017: 34).² Saying that *that jerk from the Dean’s office* “refers to” someone, for instance, is a short-cut for the idea that the phrase enables the speaker to

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² (Gunkel et al. 2017: 34) “Referenz ist demnach eine Beziehung zwischen einem Sprecher, einem sprachlichen Ausdruck und einem Gegenstand – dem Referenzobjekt oder Referenten des Ausdrucks –, wobei der Sprecher mithilfe des Ausdrucks auf den Gegenstand referiert (Strawson 1950, 1959; Searle 1969: 28; Burge 1971, 1974). Referenz ist in diesem Sinn eine Handlung, wobei die Beziehung eines Ausdrucks auf einen Gegenstand wesentlich durch die referentiellen Intentionen des Sprechers gesteuert ist.” (‘Reference is thus a relationship between a speaker, a linguistic expression and an object – the reference object or referent of the expression – whereby the speaker refers to the object by means of the expression (Strawson 1950, 1959; Searle 1969: 28; Burge 1971, 1974). In this sense, reference is an action whereby the relation of an expression to an object is essentially controlled by the referential intentions of the speaker.’)

refer to that person – similarly, saying that *this knife cuts well* does not evoke a self-cutting knife, but implies users (Abbott 2010: 2).

Such a short-cut, while common and convenient, can be misleading because it easily leads to downplaying, or even discarding, the active role of speakers in establishing or processing reference.³ This is reflected in definitions of reference such as the following: “[Reference] concerns the ability of linguistic expressions to refer to real-world entities” (Finegan 2015: 209), or “Reference is a two-place relation. One relata refers, the other (the referent) is referred to” (Biggs & Geirsson 2021: 1). This two-place description of reference as a relationship between a referential expression and an extralinguistic entity also echoes the semantic approach to reference laid out in Frege’s seminal paper “Über Sinn und Bedeutung” (1892). Let’s take Abbott’s example of *that jerk from the Dean’s office*. “Sinn” (translated in the 1948 English version as “sense”; a more common translation nowadays is “literal meaning”) is conveyed compositionally by the descriptive elements. “Bedeutung” (“reference” in the 1948 translation) has to do with what or who the NP designates – let’s say, Jeff Peterson. *That jerk from the Dean’s office* and *Jeff Peterson* have the same reference, although they do not share the same sense (for more detail on the semantic approach, see for instance Abbott 2010).

³ Here, “speaker” is understood as “anyone producing language” – be it spoken, written, signed, or other.

The aim of the present volume is to show that the difference between the three-place and the two-place description is in fact crucial. Reference is first and foremost the result of choices in a given context, based on a number of linguistic instructions, conventions, cognitive status, but also speaker and addressee mediation, contextual representations and a Theory of Mind (Premack & Woodruff 1978). Strawson (1950)'s classic "On referring" pointed out that expressions do not refer inherently, but are produced by speakers in a given context and interpreted by addressees. In this, he was taking one step further Saussure's idea (1916) that language is based on a system of signs defined by the relation between the signifier and the signified ("signification"), which has to be distinguished from the relation between a sign and the object in the world. In this volume, we would like to take one more step. Our aim is to fill a relative gap in existing research not just by acknowledging the role of speakers and addressees, but by giving them pride of place, through a focus on the relationship between conventions and pragmatic strategies in context. The studies in this volume are therefore based on authentic occurrences in their contexts of production (and reception), except for one chapter due to its theoretical framework. A number of chapters also include multimodal environments. This focus on speakers and addressees, in turn, shows how important it is to understand reference by linguistic means as being linguistic in nature. A referential expression is not so much access to a real-world entity as a set of

instructions chosen by a speaker at a particular point to access a discourse object deemed accessible within a discourse model, and which has to be interpreted by an addressee.

Section 1 first provides evidence that speakers and addressees matter in the referential process. Section 2 will then focus on a number of conventions that aid them in this task, as established by recent research on reference. Finally, section 3 will consider how the contributions to this volume further help towards a better understanding of the complex relationship between speakers, addressees, language and the extralinguistic world.

1. Evidence that speakers and addressees matter

1.1. Referents are mental objects more than real-world entities

In semantic approaches to reference, an expression is referential if it points to a specific real-world entity (or set of entities) – or an entity in an imaginary world, such as a unicorn or a fictional character. As a consequence, a number of linguists such as von Stechow (2002) or Trask (2007: 245) regard generics (*cats*), quantifier phrases (*every problem*) and phrases used attributively (e.g. *the fastest runner in Brazil* used with no knowledge of who that is, though with the conviction that a real-world

entity fits that description) as non-referential. To them, these NPs are definite, but do not have reference. This, however, we take to be a restrictive view of reference, because it fails to capture the linguistic nature of referential expressions. There are more advantages, we suggest, to taking a unifying view of referential expressions as referring to mental objects, created through *discourse* – hence the notion of “*discourse* referents.”

The concept of “discourse referent,” or “discourse entity” was first introduced by Karttunen (1976) in his study of indefinite NPs (according to Corblin 1995). As noted by Kleiber (1997: 121), the concept does not mean that entities only exist *in* discourse; rather, they are created *through* discourse. A discourse referent often corresponds to a real-world entity, but it does not have to. It may be part of an imaginary world, but more importantly, indefinite NPs may establish “short-term” referents, which have no specific reference in the extralinguistic world (they are “non-specific”), but are temporarily “interpreted specifically” in discourse, within a limited domain (Karttunen 1976). One example given by Karttunen (1976: 375) is epistemic scenarios, as in (2): “[a]t least with modals (and the future *will*), it is possible to continue discussing a thing that actually does not yet exist, provided that the discourse continues in the same mode.” Other cases include short-term referents constructed within the scope of a quantifier, as in (3), or suppositions, as in (4).

- (2) You must write a letter to your parents. It has to be sent by airmail.
The letter must get there by tomorrow.
- (3) Harvey courts a girl at every convention. She always comes to the banquet with him. The girl is usually also very pretty.
- (4) Suppose Mary has a car. She takes me to work in it. I drive the car, too.

To Karttunen (1976), what an expression needs in order to be referential is to provide access to a specific discourse entity. When no specific discourse construct is meant, then an expression is not referential. For instance, *a car* is not referential in *Bill doesn't have a car* because it could not be followed by **It is black*. Or *a Norwegian* interpreted non-specifically in *Janet wants to marry a Norwegian* ('she does not have anyone special in mind, but it is a matter of principle to her'), is non referential because it would not license the continuation *She introduced him to her mother yesterday*. This is also the conclusion, for instance, of Huddleston & Pullum (2002), Trask (2007: 245) or Finegan (2015: 209). But here again, Karttunen (1976) points out that a short-term referent might be established by the same expression in the same sentence if the speaker then elaborates on the hypothetical scenario, for instance with the continuation *Suppose that it is true, then she will certainly introduce him to her mother*. In other words, within this scenario, *a Norwegian* and *him* are interpreted specifically, despite the absence of a corresponding specific entity in the extralinguistic

world when the sentence is produced. As shown from these examples, an NP “establishes a discourse referent” when “there may be a coreferential pronoun or definite noun phrase later in the discourse” (Karttunen 1976: 385).

The notion of discourse referents as mental constructs can be (and has been) further dissociated from extralinguistic entities than in Karttunen (1976)’s proposal: a first mention may be considered referential even when there is no anaphoric pronoun in the continuation. Hedberg et al. (2019), in the Givenness Hierarchy framework, regard generics and expressions used attributively as referential because even with non-specific expressions, the speaker expects the addressee to construct or access a representation. For Aguilar-Guevara, Le Bruyn & Zwarts (2014: 1), non-specific readings display “weak referentiality” because they license an anaphoric pronoun. As summed up by Langacker (2008: 270), “[f]rom a linguistic standpoint these nominals are indeed referential, as they single out a grounded instance of a type as their referent. Their special property is that they profile a virtual instance rather than an actual one.”

Not all linguists will agree with this conclusion. Bach (2008: 16, 29), for instance, considers that “so-called discourse reference is not genuine reference.” In non-specific *Janet wants to marry a Norwegian*, he concludes that as the first mention (e.g. *a Norwegian*) is not referential (the speaker does not have a specific person in mind), neither are the anaphoric pronouns.

To him, even reference to a fictional character or a unicorn is “pseudo-reference” rather than genuine reference. In the wake of Langacker (2008: 15), we claim instead that “reference to ‘virtual’ entities (e.g. *any cat*) [is] pervasive,” and exemplifies “the diverse array of mental constructions that help us deal with – and in large measure constitute – the world we live in and talk about.” A conception of reference such as Bach’s makes “truth” and truth conditionality all important, whereas the extralinguistic world is only a human-filtered view of “reality”. Similarly, not all referential expressions are meant to have clearly identifiable referents, and yet a specific referent exists. One example is the French impersonal pronoun *on* or German *man* (cf. English *one*) (see for example Fløttum 2004, Truan 2018, Delaborde 2020): its fuzzy reference entails that, in (5), there is no evidence that the three occurrences are co-referential):

(5) après un quart d’heure d’attente [...], on vint enfin lui apprendre que mademoiselle Pauline D... n’était point mariée, et qu’elle habitait toujours la ville. Aussitôt l’étrangère ordonna qu’on mît sa voiture sous la remise et qu’on lui préparât une chambre.

(‘after a quarter-of-an-hour wait [...], [‘on’] came at last to tell her that miss Pauline D... was not married, and that she was still living in town. At once the stranger ordered that [‘on’] put her carriage under the shed

and that [‘on’] get a room ready for her.’ (our translation) (Sand 1881 - example cited by Delaborde 2020: 105)

We suggest that denying reference in fiction (fictional characters) the status of “genuine reference” is similarly too restrictive a view of cognition: the referential expressions and their processing involve the same mechanisms. The notion of “discourse referent” usefully highlights the speaker (and addressee) mediation at work in any form of communication. A referential expression is invariably interpreted against a “Mental model” (Johnson-Laird 1983), or a “text-world model” (*Textweltmodell*, Schwarz 2000, 2001; Schwarz-Friesel 2007) or, for Webber (2016 [1979]: 2), a dynamic “discourse model”, which “contains a collection of entities, recording their properties and the relations they participate in.”⁴ When using a definite pronoun, for instance, the speaker has the referent in his/her own discourse model, “assumes that on the basis of the discourse thus far, a similar entity will be in the addressee’s (partially formed) model,” (Webber 2016 [1979]: 2), and presumes that the addressee is able to access it. A key notion, therefore, is that of speaker “intention”: a speaker intends to point the addressee to the discourse entity (ibid., see also Gunkel et al. 2017: 34).

⁴ (Schwarz-Friesel 2007: 5, footnote 3) “[The text-world model] of the text is the mental representation of the referential states-of-affairs. It can be described in terms of conceptual constellations including all participating referents, their relations among each other and the events and situations in which they are performing.”

1.2. Importance of speaker intentions

As noted by Hanks (2019: 16), “[i]n ordinary conversation we never just refer to something. We always do so as part of a broader speech act” – assertions, promises, orders, and so on. Addressees therefore expect speakers to have intentions.

Intentions imply control over the use of reference (O’Rourke 2019: 10). As a consequence, if a 20th-century speaker states *The king of France is wise*, an addressee will probably not immediately discard it as uninterpretable (‘there is no king in France’). Because speaker control is expected, the addressee will rather try to understand how there may be a referent to *the king of France* in the speaker’s mind – considering this as a description for a work of fiction, for instance, or evidence that the speaker believes that there is a king in France, or gives the statement a generic (Strawson 1950: 329-330) or a metaphoric value.

Because speech itself is “initiated, monitored, and concluded intentionally,” and because “its contours reflect conscious, intentional influence if not outright control,” (O’Rourke 2019: 22), in some contexts the form of a referring expression is a crucial way for a speaker to express stance, possibly with domination issues involved. Salazar Orvig & Grossen (2010) show how in a conversation between a French patient and her psychiatrist, the latter’s use of *ces rêves-là* ‘those dreams’ where the patient

uses *cauchemars* ‘nightmares,’ shows distancing of the professional from the patient’s anguish. Speaker positioning is also evidenced among children. Salazar Orvig (2019: 302)’s study of a conversation between a French child aged 1;11 and her father finds that the child uses dislocations when she disagrees with him (*il peut pas monter le bonhomme* ‘he can’t get on(,) the man’), as opposed to just a pronoun when she shares his perspective (*il est un peu gros* ‘he is a bit fat’). This example illustrates a more general tendency in children to use dislocation to “assert their own positioning as speaker” (Salazar Orvig et al. 2010: 397-398), with the possible addition of “yes” or a negation. More generally, children tend to use third-person pronouns in subject position for plain continuity, and nouns (or demonstratives) in cases of contrast (Salazar Orvig 2019: 302) with possible (re)assertion.

1.3. Importance of addressees

Reference is about providing access to a linguistically established entity. Consequently, addressees are crucial for reference, as too seldom pointed out in studies on reference, in at least two ways.⁵

⁵ The term *addressee* is slightly too restrictive, as someone might overhear a conversation and still process the message – including referential expressions. It was preferred over *listener*, which, too, is commonly used in pragmatics, because *addressee* is perhaps less connoted for spoken verbal language (so that it easily accommodates sign language and written language), and because it is for the addressee alone (whether real, virtual, imagined or universal) that a speaker may adjust to a Common Ground. *Hearer*, another commonly

First, as speaker reference is an act of communication, it is “essentially audience-oriented”, in that “a speaker uses an expression to refer his audience to an individual” (Bach 2008: 17). Reference is thus not just a three-place relation, as suggested by Abbott (2010)’s definition given at the beginning of this chapter, but a *four*-place relation, “between a speaker, an expression, an audience, and a referent: you use an expression to refer someone to something” (Bach 2008: 15).

This importance of addressees is evidenced by foundational processes in language acquisition, such as establishing common communicative ground and joint attention (Tomasello 2003: 65). Studies in the field of language acquisition have shown that manual pointing is of paramount importance in acquisition, as it creates the relation between toddler, addressee and objects, a “referential triangle” (Tomasello 1999) which often leads the adult to provide the name of the object pointed at by the child. Tomasello (2003:65) reports further findings on “a very high correlation between the amount of time infants spent in joint engagements with their mothers (...) and the size of the infants’s vocabulary”.

A cooperative speaker has to take into account the interlocutors’ Common Ground, that is, the “body of information which interlocutors have reason to believe that each other have access to in the context of utterance” (Roberts 2019: 274). The Common Ground contains not only explicitly

used term, was dispreferred here because it implies a more passive attitude than *listener* or

asserted propositions, but also all kinds of (supposedly) shared information, including shared encyclopaedic knowledge, conforming to the Theory of Mind. Reference is largely based on inferences, and reference processing requires constant “dynamic update and downdate” (Roberts 2019: 277). For instance, *Paul bought a Toyota because they’re such robust cars* (adapted from Kleiber 1991) requires an addressee to understand *they* as referring to Toyotas despite the lack of a plural antecedent. Another example is indirect anaphora, as in *I have been angling for hours, but they just won’t bite* (*Ich angele jetzt schon seit Stunden, aber sie wollen einfach nicht anbeißen*, Schwarz 2000: 123).

Speakers are typically cooperative, following Grice’s cooperation principle: they are expected to consider the Common Ground, and adjust to addressees as necessary. Cooperation, however, is just one convention, as shown by the *cauchemars* (‘nightmares’) example above. A speaker may choose to ignore elements of the Common Ground, which may require addressee adjustment (example of the *king of France* above) or lead to failure to achieve reference (the addressee may then have to ask for clarification or rephrasing).

Based on these facts, Consten (2004) proposes to define reference as a “hearer-centred process” (*hörerseitiger Prozess*, literally ‘a process on the hearer’s side’), “triggered by language reception” (6).

addressee.

(6) Ich fasse Referenz als hörerseitigen Prozess auf, der durch Sprachrezeption ausgelöst wird und – unter Einbeziehung situativer Faktoren – auf die Identifikation eines Referenzobjektes abzielt. Ein entsprechendes Referenzkonzept wird aktiviert und in die aktuelle Diskursrepräsentation integriert. Letzteren Prozess beziehe ich ausdrücklich in die Referenzdefinition ein, denn die Integrierbarkeit in den aktuellen Diskurs ist das wichtigste Kriterium für die Auswahl aus verschiedenen möglichen Referenzobjekten, etwa im Falle ambiger Referenz sowie für die Instanziierung von Referenten (vgl. Schwarz 1995: 466). (Consten 2004: 56)

(‘I understand reference as a process taking place on the hearer’s side, which is triggered by language reception and – taking situational factors into account – aims at identifying a reference object. A corresponding mental image of the referent is activated and integrated into the current discourse representation. I expressly include the latter process in the definition of reference, because the ability to be integrated into the current discourse is the most important criterion for selection from various possible referential objects, for example in the case of ambiguous reference and for the instantiation of referents (see Schwarz 1995: 466).’)

Addressees are also essential to reference for a second reason: they are actors in the processing of referential expressions – in spoken communication, they are “listeners” rather than just “hearers.” When processing messages, they do not always process referential expressions in depth. This is known as “good-enough” comprehension (Ferreira et al. 2002), or “shallow processing” (Kaiser & Fedele 2019: 332), and is the result of limited attentional resources (Kaiser & Fedele 2019: 331). An example of shallow processing is provided by Stewart et al. (2007), who measured whole-sentence reading times for fabricated sentences with ambiguous or unambiguous pronouns, such as *Paul lent {Rick / Kate} the CD before {he / she} left for the holidays*. When they asked comprehension questions, they found that when the questions did not require pronoun resolution (e.g. *Did Paul lend Rick the CD?*), reading times were not affected by whether the pronoun was ambiguous or not. This is evidence of shallow processing: ambiguous pronouns are left underspecified at this stage, and will be resolved later if necessary, for instance if there is another question or if disambiguating information is provided (see Kaiser & Fedele 2019 for similar findings from other studies). When the comprehension questions did require pronoun resolution, on the other hand, informants had to engage in deep processing, so that ambiguous pronouns led to longer reading times.

Good-enough processing may lead addressees to be blind to errors in referential expressions. One example is the Moses Illusion: people, even when they are familiar with the Bible, tend to answer “two” to the question *how many of each type of animal did Moses take on the ark?*, not noticing that “Moses” is used instead of “Noah” (Erickson & Mattson 1981). This example is evidence that comprehension relies very much on prediction: the information structure of a *wh*-question presupposes that everything apart from the *wh*-phrase (here, “Moses took x animals on the ark”) is considered true. Due to expectations of speaker control and cooperation, there is no reason for the addressee to doubt the truth of that presupposed information. Another example is provided by eye-tracking experiments: a highly predictable word is more likely to be skipped than other words (Ferreira & Lowder 2016: 224).

Clark (2013) therefore describes the brain as a “prediction engine”: rather than passively process the information as it is received, the addressee constantly predicts what might be said next and adjusts his/her representations when necessary (Ferreira & Lowder 2016: 224). This process, also known as “forward modeling” (Pickering & Garrod 2004), is facilitated by the prototypical information structure in discourse. Typically, information is ordered from *given* to *new*. In addition, in Centering Theory, Grosz, Joshi & Weinstein (1995) have established the importance of “forward-looking” and “backward-looking” “centers” (that is, entities,

referents) in building local coherence over several segments of discourse: they help speakers predict the most likely continuations. For example, (7) illustrates a type of transition called “center retaining” (“retention of the center from one utterance to the next,” but not to subsequent utterances, Grosz, Joshi & Weinstein 1995: 210). (7a) exhibits reference to two entities, Susan and Betsy, called two “forward-looking centers.” The highest-ranking one is Susan (as it is in subject position, in accordance with the Centering Theory’s grammar-based ranking principles), who consequently becomes the preferred backward-looking center in (7b). In (7b), Susan is still the highest-ranking forward-looking center (pronoun in subject position). This makes her the backward-looking centre of (7c), hence reference via a personal pronoun there (*her*). In (7c), however, Susan is no longer the highest-ranking forward-looking center for what will come next: it is now Betsy’s turn, as she is referred to by a proper name in subject position. This predicts that if there was a segment (7d), it would probably exhibit a “smooth shift,” with Betsy now referred to with a personal pronoun (Cornish 2000; Vinckel-Roisin 2012).

(7) (constructed string, borrowed from Grosz, Joshi & Weinstein 1995: 206)

- a. Susan gave Betsy a pet hamster.
- b. She reminded her that such hamsters were quite shy.

c. Betsy told her that she really liked the gift.

By generating a set of likely candidates for coming referential expressions, prediction processes facilitate the integration of new information in discourse processing (Ferreira & Lowder 2016: 241). Prediction failures, which are also part of the process, allow addressees to update their models of a given domain (Ferreira & Lowder 2016: 240-241).

In addition to predicting, addressees restore, as shown by several experiments (Handel 1989). Contrary to prediction, which is a form of anticipation, the restoration process works backwards. For example, missing phonemes may be automatically restored, as in “It was found that the -eel was on the orange,” for which participants were convinced that they had actually heard *peel*. The whole context facilitates meaning retrieval.

The constraints of cognitive limitations on reference processing are further evidenced by studies of Alzheimer’s Disease patients, both for reference interpretation and production. Due to working memory impairments, AD patients “are better able to maintain information about referents when full NPs are used”, unlike healthy subjects (Almor et al. 1999). They find pronouns more difficult to process because they lack descriptive content, thus requiring more reliance on the semantic information stored in the working memory. Conversely, when producing narrative discourse, they use fewer of “the referential expressions expected

at the introduction and shift stages” than healthy aged adults, probably due to lexical retrieval difficulties or, here again, working memory impairments (Sandoz et al. 2020).

Now that we have established that speakers and addressees are central to the selection and processing of referential expressions, we take a closer look at a number of conventions that aid them in this task.

2. Conventions underlying the referential process

The linguistic material of a referential expression is an obvious influence on what it may or may not select in context: it provides instructions that help to identify the referent. More specifically, lexical elements contribute descriptions (e.g. *black cat* in *that black cat*), while determiners or pronouns give processing instructions (e.g. *that* expresses ostension and, in contrast with *this*, a form of distance). As a consequence, when in a given context, a number of expression types might be acceptable, they have different implications. For instance, in (8), the demonstrative is a way to “appeal to some shared experience, attempting to bring the past to life” (Ariel 1990: 199), whereas a definite article would just uniquely identify the referent. This, we suggest, is due to the extra “pointing” that the demonstrative provides, here pointing to shared memories.

(8) (Ariel 1990: 199) That holiday we spent in Cyprus was really something, wasn't it?

But beyond this linguistic material, as summed up by Aguilar-Guevara, Le Bruyn & Zwarts (2014: 1), “[m]any different factors can play a role in reference apart from the noun and the determiner, like the linguistic and non-linguistic context, the salience of the referent, world knowledge, and the syntactic position and information status of the noun phrase.” It would be impossible to consider them all here. Within the linguistic material alone, beyond the referential expressions themselves, there are many influences. One of them is coherence-based relations between constituents, as pointed out in section 1 with Centering Theory (see also alternative frameworks, such as the functional model of centering of Strube & Hahn 1996, 1999). Discourse structure may establish topics or centres of attention, through information structure (including the choice of syntactic subject, or suprasegmental features such as intonation), but also in relation to the semantics of the verb. For instance, with *because*, some verbs favour subject continuation, others object continuation. *The prisoner confessed to the guard because he...* projects the prisoner as the likely referent of *he*, whereas *the mother punished her daughter because she...* projects the daughter as the likely referent of *she* (Garvey & Garamazza 1974, Kaiser &

Fedele 2019: 327). Free indirect discourse (FID) might also create its own bias for pronoun resolution, depending on the “perspectival structure” it establishes (Kaiser 2015). For example, *Mary looked woefully at Elizabeth. Poor girl; she was sick* leads the reader to interpret *she* as referring to Elizabeth, which is not the case without the FID cue *poor girl*: in *Mary looked woefully at Elizabeth. She was sick*, the reference of *she* is ambiguous.

In this section, we will take a closer look at two types of conventions that have been the focus of a lot of recent research: the cognitive status of the referent, and genre.

2.1. Influence of cognitive status on the form of referential expressions

Cognitive research on reference in the past twenty years has shown a relationship between expression types and cognitive statuses, a convention which facilitates reference processing. The exact relationship is not unanimously established to date, except for personal pronouns. In particular, it still requires further research into the link between cognitive requirements and linguistic material. But existing studies do exhibit some definite trends. We will consider two approaches here: Ariel’s (1990) Accessibility Marking Scale, and Gundel et al.’s (1993) Givenness Hierarchy.

In Ariel (1990)'s model, the Accessibility Marking Scale (9), referring expressions are ranked according to the degree of Accessibility of the referent that they signal: "[t]he choice of a referring expression is dependent on the Accessibility status the mental representation of the referent is assumed to have for the addressee at the current stage of the discourse" (Ariel 1990: 69).

(9) Ariel's Accessibility Marking Scale

Low Accessibility

full name + modifier

full name

long definite descriptions

short definite descriptions

last name

first name

distal demonstrative + modifier

proximal demonstrative + modifier

distal demonstrative (+ NP)

proximal demonstrative (+ NP)

stressed pronoun + gesture

stressed pronoun

unstressed pronoun

cliticized pronoun

Extremely High Accessibility Markers (gaps, including *pro*, *PRO* and *wh* traces, reflexives, and Agreement)

High Accessibility

As Ariel (1990: 198-99) herself stresses, a speaker is not constrained by the degree of Accessibility signalled by the expression type: in some cases, “despite an assessed degree of Accessibility *x*, a speaker chooses a marker associated with either a lower or a higher degree of Accessibility than *x*.” However, such discrepancies are meant to “encourage an addressee to derive specific additional contextual implications.” This is confirmed for instance by (10), in which topic continuation might have triggered *he* rather than the NP *the animal*. Going for a phrase that marks a lower degree of

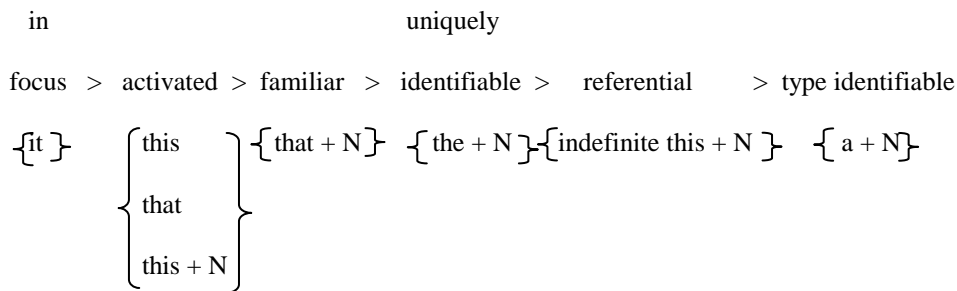
Accessibility suggests a change of perspective, from a person-like treatment of the cat, making decisions and interacting with guests, to distancing as the speaker looks for an explanation (*It was not that...*).

(10) (Morris 1989) Thomas Huxley, the great biologist, whose household was dominated by a long series of cats over a period of forty years, described how one of them, a young tabby tom-cat, developed the alarming game of jumping on the shoulders of his dinner-guests and refusing to dismount until they fed him some titbit. It was not that the animal was hungry. It was the shock impact of the game that provided the reward.

Gundel et al. (1993), rather than make predictions about degrees of Accessibility, sought to establish minimal cognitive requirements for each expression type, and to characterize cognitive statuses. They proposed the Givenness Hierarchy (11). Again, there is no one-to-one mapping. A given cognitive status implies all those to its right (for instance, a referent that is activated is also familiar, uniquely identifiable and so on), so that often, in theory, an expression type might be replaced by one of those to its right. The Hierarchy only establishes minimal requirements, which are also preferences. For instance, in English, a personal pronoun requires a referent

that is “in focus”, while *that* + *N* requires a referent that is not just uniquely identifiable, like *the* + *N*, but at least familiar.

(11) Gundel et al. (1993)’s Givenness Hierarchy



A given expression type might be used for cognitive statuses to the left of its preferred status. For instance, even though *that* + *N* requires a referent that is at least familiar, it may be used for one that is activated or in focus – but it may not be used for a status to its right, for instance for an entity that is uniquely identifiable, but not familiar. A personal pronoun has to be used for a referent “in focus”. Gundel et al. (1993) propose that deviations from the preferred expression type for a given cognitive status is the result of specific conversational implicatures, in relation to Grice’s maxim of quantity.⁶ There are probably other factors as well, one of which is genre –

⁶ (Grice 1975) Maxims of quantity:
 Q1: Make your contribution as informative as required (for the current purposes of the exchange).

see 2.2 below. But the association between expression types and preferred or minimal cognitive statuses does provide a refined understanding of speaker choices in context.

For instance, because a personal pronoun implies a referent “in focus”, a seemingly antecedentless pronoun may reflect the fact that the referent is a major continuing concern of the focaliser’s, as in (12) (Emmott 1995: 246).

(12) (Rankin 2000: 173-4) It was late evening, and Rebus was driving.

Not the M90 into Fife: tonight, he was on the M8, heading west, heading for Glasgow. He’d spent half an hour at the hospital, followed by an hour and a half with Rhona and Jackie Platt, their guest for dinner at the Sheraton. He’d worn a fresh suit and shirt. He hadn’t smoked. He’d drunk a bottle of Highland Spring.

They were planning yet more tests on Sammy. The neurologist had taken them into his office and talked them through the procedures.

Here, *they* does not refer to Rebus and his wife Rhona, or Rhona and their guest, despite the previous mention. Rebus’s “overriding concern” in the novel is Sammy’s medical situation, so that it remains in focus in internal focalisation passages, as an arch-topic. The move away from Rhona and

Q2: Do not make your contribution more informative than required.

Jackie Platt at the end of the first paragraph (*He*), together with the paragraph break and the shift from the past perfect to the past progressive (*were planning*), prepares readers for a possible return to that major concern of Rebus's. Reference processing of *They* might involve initial repair on readers' part, but this is easily achieved once they read *tests on Sammy* (Emmott 1995).

Another example of the influence of perspective on cognitive status, and consequently, on the choice of referential expressions, is "override" reflexive pronouns in English, that is, the use of reflexives where the default use would be a personal pronoun (e.g. *Ann claimed that junior lecturers like herself were being exploited. / Paul was determined to be promoted ahead of Sue. That profile of himself in the company newsletter would certainly help.*). These third-person override reflexives are often found in free indirect style, as in these examples, when the antecedent refers to the focaliser (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 1495).

2.2. Influence of genre on referential expressions and referential chains

As noted by Thurmair (2003), the influence of genre ('Textsortenspezifik') has long been underestimated in linguistics. Recent research has established that genre definitely has an influence on the properties of referential chains (e.g. Thurmair 2003, Schnedecker & Landragin 2014, Schnedecker 2021). It

is more generally one of the five external constraints on the composition of referential chains, as defined by Schnedecker (2021: 149-199), along with the period in which the discourse was produced, the language or family of languages in which it is produced, the ontological nature of the entities, and the medium of communication. There are additional internal constraints related to discourse structure (*ibid.*).

Some data show an influence of genre on expression types, regardless of issues of cognitive status. For instance, Condamines (2005: 45) finds that in French, hyperonymic anaphoric expressions are significantly more common in technical texts than in novels. Press articles commonly exhibit what Ranger (2002: 87) calls “dispensable lexical anaphoric expressions”, that is, NPs whose lexical content is not directly relevant at the point when it is used. For instance, in (13), the information contained in the underlined NP (age, titles of famous films) is irrelevant to understanding why Polanski pleaded guilty (Baumer et al. 2021: 38). This generic convention therefore ignores principles of relevance, necessity of the linguistic material for identification, or cognitive status. A reader who is not very familiar with Polanski might even find it difficult to process reference here, because the information might be new to him/her.

(13) (Addley & Connelly 2009) But, it was revealed today, the past has finally caught up with Roman Polanski. The film director was arrested

in Switzerland on Saturday on a decades-old warrant relating to the rape of a 13-year-old girl in 1977.

The director had travelled to Switzerland to accept a lifetime achievement award at the Zurich film festival, the organisers of which expressed “great consternation and shock” at his detention.

The 76-year-old director of *Rosemary’s Baby* and *Chinatown* pleaded guilty to the assault at the time but jumped bail and fled the US the following year to avoid a lengthy jail sentence.

Similarly, in advertising discourse in France, it has become acceptable to use a low Accessibility marker for a highly accessible referent. Schnedecker (1995) calls these referential expressions “rebel redenominations” (*redénominations rebelles*). One instance is an advert for the skin care product *Extra-Vieille*.

(14) (example cited by Schnedecker 1995: 317) *Extra-Vieille* est un accord parfait de notes hespéridées, délicatement soutenues par un cœur orange et agreste. *Extra-Vieille* existe en eau de Cologne, en bain moussant, en gel douche, en lait pour le corps, en savon et en déodorant. (*‘Extra-Vieille is a perfect mix of citrus notes, delicately enhanced by a rustic orange core. Extra-Vieille comes in cologne, foaming bath, shower gel, body lotion, soap and deodorant.’*)

A last example, from present-day German, is the use of proper names in press comments. A journalist who takes an argumentative stance will very commonly repeat proper names for a highly accessible referent, even when reference is unambiguous (see Vinckel-Roisin 2018). In extract (15) below, which comments on the national German football team's defeat to Italy, the journalist's criticism of coach Joachim Löw is made explicit in the fifth paragraph. The first two sentences convey the journalist's claim; the third, in which the proper name *Löw* is repeated, marks a shift to the arguments that substantiate the claim. Repeating *Löw* therefore hints at a change in stages of stance-taking, in a “*claim* → *arguments*” sequence (Vinckel-Roisin 2018: 177-179).

(15) (example cited by Vinckel-Roisin 2018: 178) Die Fehler im Spiel haben die Spieler begangen, aber der Ur-Fehler stammt von *ihrem Trainer*. *Löw* hat sich mit *seinen* Beschlüssen über die Turnier-Wirklichkeit erhoben, die *sein* Team bis dahin aufgebaut hatte. *Löw* liebt es, das Unerwartete zu tun, unkonventionell zu handeln, sich über die klassischen, oft ja auch platten Weisheiten hinwegzusetzen. *Seine* Ideen haben sich oft als produktiv erwiesen: [...] (sueddeutsche.de, 29.06.2012)

(‘Mistakes on the football pitch are the players’, but the original mistake lies with *their coach*. With *his* choices, *Löw* posed as a master above the reality of the championship that his team had built so far. *Löw* likes to do unexpected things, to act in an unconventional way, to ignore traditional, often trivial, certainties. *His* ideas have often proved productive: [...])

Conventions might evolve over time. For instance, in Anglo-Norman judicial documents, proper names were repeated even for referents in focus because it was a convention of the genre (Capin 2014: 73).

Beyond an influence on preferences for individual referential expressions, genre has an effect on the overall properties of reference chains, such as distance between links of the chains or proportions of pronouns.⁷ Tutin (2002), for instance, concludes from an exploratory corpus of French texts that referential density, defined as the proportion of referential expressions against the overall number of words, is higher in novels than in human sciences research papers; or that long-distance pronouns (pronouns whose closest non-pronominal antecedent is at a long

⁷ Distance calculations are themselves a major issue in studies of reference chains. One complex question is where a reference chain begins and ends. For instance, it would not be realistic to regard all references to the protagonist of a novel as a single reference chain (Schnedecker & Landragin 2014: 6). But where exactly to end one chain is no easy matter. Another, related issue is that of the most relevant criteria for measurement. If what matters is that the referent should be activated in the discourse model, for instance, Combettes & Tomassone (1988: 14) ask whether time of activation should be measured in terms of reading time, or of number of sentences between two links in the chain, or even of speaker (as opposed to addressee) activation of the referent.

distance) are much more common in the former than in the latter. Similar comparative studies have been carried out for other genres, such as dosage instructions or user manuals (Thurmair 2003), recipes and introductions to news items (Schneidecker & Longo 2013), encyclopaedic articles (Schneidecker 2014), or short stories and journalistic portraits (Baumer 2015). A study of a homogenised corpus, viz. soft news articles with a title in the form “topic - comment” (e.g. *Museum’s £3m Cezanne stolen*), suggests that “referential chains are still heterogenous”, but that there are indeed genre-related properties (Baumer et al. 2021). Many issues deserve further investigation, in particular the interaction between these data and cognitive status, linguistic material; or which genres are relevant for categorisation, beyond very specific ones such as recipes.

3. From conventions to pragmatics: contribution of the present volume to current research on the referential process ⁸

⁸ We would like to thank the 33 anonymous reviewers for their very helpful comments on the drafts of the chapters.

This volume brings together a cross-section of current research on referential conventions and pragmatic strategies, in a number of different fields (formal and theoretical linguistics, semantics, discourse analysis,

psycholinguistics, interactional linguistics, natural language processing), different verbal and non-verbal languages (English, German, different varieties of French, Indonesian, Belgian sign language) and different contexts (language acquisition, second language learning, and various genres such as news articles, narratives, game playing or satire). It is meant as a series of thought-provoking studies which place speakers and addressees at the core of the referential act. We hope that the volume can modestly contribute to a refined understanding of the nature of conventions when encoding or decoding referential expressions, and of the relationship between internalised conventions and pragmatic choices.

Part I introduces new theoretical insights into referential conventions. **Manfred Krika & Fereshteh Modarresi** consider the relationship between syntactic integration within a noun phrase (degrees of object incorporation, as illustrated for instance in German, for the activity of fishing, by *viele Fische fangen*, *Fische fangen*, *am Fische fangen sein*, *beim Fischfang sein* and *fischen*), degree of definiteness (strong definites, weak definites, bare nominals) and likelihood of anaphoric uptake. They conclude from experiments with constructed examples that even though highly incorporated objects (*am Fischfang sein*) and weak definites (*ins Kino gehen* ‘go to the pictures’), for instance, mention entities (fish and the pictures in these examples), syntax prevents those entities from reaching discourse referent status, and consequently, from being antecedents for

subsequent mentions. This finding has theoretical implications beyond German: the authors also include references to Persian and pseudo-incorporated objects. **Elise Mathurin**, working on English *it* in weather sentences, calls for a theoretical distinction between “referential” and “replaceable by a full NP”. In the wake of Bolinger’s notion of “ambience” and Langacker’s Cognitive Grammar framework, she argues for a deictic dimension to *it*, and coins the concept of “referential intention”: the addressee is expected to consider an abstract setting that is both obvious in nature and vague enough to be hard to delimit exactly. **Laure Gardelle** considers generic bare plurals in characterizing sentences, such as *birds* in *birds fly*, which she argues are referential. She focuses on how plurals may license exceptions in context, an issue which is not satisfactorily accounted for by existing quantification or probability models. Using the “generics-as-default” approach of psychologists instead, she adds the notion of “negligibility” to account for exception licensing, with the crucial notion that pragmatic features such as speaker knowledge and beliefs play a role in the contextual evaluation of what is negligible or not. She further shows that negligibility is also at work with plurals in specific contexts, because plurals convey generalizations through a process which she terms “homogeneization”.

The next two chapters consider reference from the perspective of reference chains, an area which has only been partially investigated (see above).

Dominique Dias, focusing on genre, seeks to understand what exactly, within a genre, has an influence on reference chains. From a corpus of 80 newspaper literary reviews in French and German, he concludes that a strictly global approach to genre is not satisfactory. Taking a more local, in-context perspective, he finds an influence of the type of referent (because referents of different types are involved in different processes), of editorial conventions in a given newspaper, and of writing perspectives. **Silvia Federzoni, Lydia-Mai Ho-Dac and Cécile Fabre**, working on data in French, also find an influence of conventions or conventionalised perspectives on the choice of referential expressions within chains. They foreground two dimensions: genre, and animacy, which regardless of text type provides further evidence of the anthropocentric bias in the way humans consider the world around them.

The last chapter in Part I focuses on the role of gestures in reference, more specifically in constructed action, a referential strategy which implies using the body and the voice to depict referents and their actions. **Sébastien Vandennitte** seeks to determine whether signing and speaking linguistic communities use different articulators (body parts and voice) to denote referents, through the first-ever quantitative analysis of comparable data from LSFB (French Belgian Sign Language) signers and Belgian French speakers. The two language communities appear to be using the same articulators to depict referents, although LSFB signers use constructed

action to a greater extent. Head and gaze are the most frequently used articulators, facial expression being prominent in LSF. The data also shows differences in the use of facial expressions, hands and/or arms.

Parts II to IV investigate the relationship between conventions and pragmatic exploitation. Part II focuses on argumentative contexts. **Michelle Lecolle** considers the argumentative potential of plural references to humans in domains for which there are social or political stakes. Plural reference may be achieved through either pluralised count nouns, like *les Français* ‘the French/French people’, or collective nouns (and corresponding NPs), such as *l’opinion publique* ‘public opinion’. She finds that regardless of their insertion in discourse, the grammar of these nouns and NPs allows for a number of argumentative strategies, such as vagueness or ambiguities, generalizations, and existential presupposition. The grammar of these nouns also triggers partly different argumentative potentials: only collective nouns exhibit a double layer of conceptualisation (one whole / many parts), which in context might activate further strategies, such as foregrounding of cohesion. **Elodie Vargas and Jérémy Machy** show how referential expressions can be revelators of cultural representations, through a corpus-based study of references to a controversial technological invention: electric vehicles, in the French and the German press. They find very different attitudes in the two countries, with corresponding differences, for instance, in the use of metaphors. The authors also show that a given referential

expression can only be interpreted within the context in which it is used, so that even a seemingly “neutral” noun phrase may in fact be highly subjective, even argumentative, as it may carry strong ideological, economic, political and cultural orientations. It is a very different type of argumentative context that **Novi Djenaar** explores in her contribution. She shows that in Indonesian argumentative practices, referring to the self and the addressee by means of pronouns, kin terms or other nouns, accomplishes more than simple referring. Based on a corpus of political interviews, she finds that making the first-person pronoun explicit in subject position, in co-occurrence with a speech or cognition verb, identifies the speaker as a claimant and agent of assertions. In addition, for second person reference, when a minimal, conventional form does not accomplish what it was meant to do, a more-than-minimal form can serve as a rhetorical device to elicit a response.

Part III moves away from argumentative contexts to focus on creative uses of referential expressions. **Stephen Skalicky & Victoria Chen** investigate the use of *this* in a large corpus of headlines from three North American satirical newspapers. They are specifically interested in instances in which pronominal *this* is used without a clear referent; they designate this use as the “empty satirical *this*” (e.g., *None of This Would Have Happened Had You Flossed*). The lack of a clear referent may lead to the co-construction of satirical meaning, the final resolution of which depends upon the reader’s

willingness and ability to provide a fitting referent. The empty satirical *this* was found in all three newspapers, representing a creative and unique use of *this* which is atypical in non-satirical headlines. **Samia Ounoughi** considers the coinage of oronyms (proper nouns that denote portions of mountain relief) by members of the Alpine Club of London in the 19th century. She concludes that oronyms actually create places, as they carve out portions of relief from what is really a continuum. In this, they are a specific type of proper noun. Coining new oronyms requires cooperation and co-construction among speakers, both to achieve toponymation and to reach “referential efficiency”, that is, carve out a zone that may not be exactly similar, but that is deemed sufficiently similar in context for communication needs. Finally, **Thomas Bertin**’s study of *artère* (‘artery’) in French literature shows that creativity may be recursive over time. This bodily metaphor, initially creative (it is first found in Victor Hugo’s *Hunchback of Notre-Dame*), became dead over time; but it is now used in creative ways in literature, either to add explanations or justifications through modifiers (which may occasionally be at odds with the prototypical representation of *artère*), or to extend the notion beyond roads.

Part IV focuses on the pragmatics of reference in contexts of interaction. **Manfred Consten** first brings new insights as to how crucially important addressees are in referentialization strategies. From a corpus of oral conversations in German, he shows that reference is not just about

activating referents and making them part of a mental discourse representation. Rather, it is a “collaborative, interactive procedure”. Participants may agree about the concept to which they refer, but they may also cooperatively look for the right concept, or find that even though they use the same referential expression, they are not targeting the same concept. As a consequence, reference should not be considered as a “chain of single acts”, but as an “ongoing communicative activity”. The next chapter turns to the emergence of joint construction of reference in L2 French. **Heike Baldauf-Quilliatre, Elizaveta Chernyshova, Isabel Colón de Carvajal, Carole Étienne, Lydia Heiden & Laurène Smykowski** carry out a multimodal conversation analysis on data collected *in situ* during a card game session. In the situation under study, the participants need to find a common solution to compensate for a missing card, in order to continue their activity, without necessarily having the proper L2 resources at their disposal. Their creativity is therefore mobilized, and different verbal and non-verbal resources are temporally fine-tuned (among others, joint visual attention on the object gesturally put in focus). Once the referent-function association is established and grounded, it is “activated” later on thanks to an iconic gesture.

The chapter by **Caroline David, Laurence Vincent-Durroux, Kerry Mullan, Christine Béal & Cécile Poussard** also deals with spoken data from L2 learners, but moves away from nominal reference to consider

temporal reference. From recordings of French L2 learners of English and English native speakers retelling the events they watched in a short film extract, the authors show that such a common, unobtrusive word as *and* carries cultural conventions in the structuring of discourse. This could not have been expected from the strictly grammatical potential of French and English, as *et / and* might be used with the same values (including temporal values, which are the focus of the present study). Yet French and English participants use *and* in partly different ways, with a strong influence of French *et* for the former. While the influence of L1 is not novel, this study is innovative in that it brings to light a lack of awareness of conventional structuring among advanced learners, and also hypothesizes a possible cognitive load created by the task, which involves complex communication. The social proximity between the speakers and the interviewer (all of them students) might also have a pragmatic influence.

In the final chapter, **Marine Le Mené-Guigoures, Anne Salazar Orvig, Christine Da Silva-Genest & Haydée Marcos** turn to L1, more specifically to the choice of personal and demonstrative pronouns in adult-child dialogues. They find that already for toddlers, personal pronouns are preferred in subject / topic position, which is not the case for demonstrative pronouns. In order to establish whether this is due to adjustment to the cognitive status of the referent, they consider several parameters: syntactic function (subject / non-subject), position (first mention / subsequent

mention), type of activity (e.g., playing, reading), and discourse type (e.g., action description, event description). They find that in both children aged 2 and adults, it would be wrong to claim that just one of these parameters has an influence. They also find that the strength of these parameters differs partly in the two sets of speakers. They suggest that children might not be considering the cognitive status of the entity, but because they repeat or connect to the adult's uses, they experience the use of pronouns in adequate positions, which enables them to form generalizations.

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