

THE SEMANTIC INSIGNIFICANCE OF REFERENTIAL INTENTIONS

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Summary

It is argued that none of the speaker's referential intentions accompanying his utterance of a demonstrative are semantically significant but rather the associated demonstration (or some other source of salience). It is constitutive of the speaker's having the specifically referential intention – held by Kent Bach to be semantically significant – that the speaker is taking, and relying upon, his accompanying gesture (or some other source of salience) as semantically significant, making it the case that this intention is not even partly semantically significant. The same is then shown to hold for the speaker's remaining referential intentions: his intention aimed at a perceived object, believed by David Kaplan to be semantically significant, as well as the intention to refer to the object that he has in mind.

I

It is a widely-shared view that in order for us to know what illocutionary speech act the speaker has performed by making an utterance (typically of a sentence), i.e., to know what its propositional content and its force are, we need to know what his relevant intention is.¹ Given this, it also seems that the speaker's referential intention plays a decisive (semantic) role in determining the reference of an expression (singular or otherwise) that he is uttering in the sense of making it the case that a certain object is being referred to. This

1. For this view, see, amongst others, Strawson (1964a), Searle (1969), Lewis (1969), Bach and Harnish (1979).

especially appears to be true of (perceptual) demonstratives as their linguistic meaning alone is short of fully accomplishing this task. Thus, Kripke suggests that their reference will always be (partly) determined by the speaker's intentions (1977, p. 14), although he does not specify them. More specific in this respect is Kaplan who at one time held that it is the speaker's demonstration accompanying his utterance of a demonstrative expression that fixes its referent. He now regards it as a mere externalization of the speaker's directing or perceptual intention – the intention aimed at a perceived object which may or may not be the object the speaker has in mind (1989, p. 583). As he provides no argument in support of this claim, Marga Reimer (1991) has tried to reconstruct one. Having done this, she attempts to show that the relevant facts are in line with the view that it is the demonstration, rather than the speaker's directing intention, that is semantically significant.² Enter Kent Bach (1992), insisting that the directing intention is the wrong intention to fix on and that Kaplan's contention that the demonstration has no semantic significance is borne out if we fix on a different, specifically referential intention (to be specified shortly). I will argue that this view is wrong since it is constitutive of the speaker's having an intention of this kind that he is taking, and relying upon, his accompanying gesture (or some other source of salience) as semantically significant, revealing that it is not semantically significant at all. The same will then be shown to hold for the speaker's remaining referential intentions, i.e., his directing intention and the intention to refer to the object that he has in mind.

2. Reimer suggests that Kaplan was led to adopt his view by considering scenarios in which the speaker's intended and actual demonstratum converge – and would have done so even in the absence of the accompanying demonstrations (p. 178). Note, however, that in the main body of his 'Demonstratives' he takes the notion of demonstration as a theoretical concept, meaning that there are no cases in which an utterance of a demonstrative expression is not accompanied by a demonstration since "a demonstration may also be opportune and require no special action on the speaker's part, as when someone shouts 'Stop that man' while only one man is rushing toward the door" (1989 p. 490).

II

Bach contends that what is said by a demonstrative sentence, to the extent to which it is not determined by its linguistic meaning, is determined by speaker intention. When demonstrating is involved, this intention itself includes the intention to refer to what one is demonstrating. The latter intention, the specifically referential one, is the one the speaker intends and expects his audience to recognize and rely upon in order to identify a certain object as the referent. It is part of a communicative intention, “a reflexive intention whose distinctive feature is that ‘its fulfillment consists in its recognition’ by one’s audience, partly by supposing (in Gricean fashion) that the speaker intends his intention to be recognized” (1992, p. 143). In other words, the referential intention in question determines reference in the sense of *making it the case* that a certain object is being referred to, which is to say that it is *semantically* significant. On the other hand, Bach holds that an act of demonstration, together with any other source of salience, is only a customary cue selected by the speaker to enable the audience to determine the referent in the sense of identifying it, for he does not expect the audience to be a mind-reader. That is, unlike linguistic meaning, demonstration is significant only *pragmatically*, not semantically.

In support of this conclusion, Bach remarks correctly (*op. cit.*, p. 143) that the speaker’s directing intention is not reflexive and thereby not semantically significant as it is clearly possible for the speaker to refer to an object even if he has not intended this. He might intend to demonstrate Fido but in fact demonstrate Spot, the dog that is, say, beside Fido. And the same applies to the speaker’s intention to refer to the object that he has in mind (which may but need not be the object aimed at by his directing intention). By contrast, the specifically referential intention cannot by its nature go astray and miss the demonstrated object, which, in Bach’s view, reveals that it is itself reflexive, hence semantically significant. It is reflexive as

The audience is to identify what you are using ‘that dog’ to refer to by thinking of Fido not as Fido but the dog you are pointing at. Surely, you do not intend your audience to recognize your intention to refer to Fido;

if you were, then saying ‘That dog is Fido’ could not be informative. So it is unsurprising that *this* intention can be trumped by a demonstrative gesture. However, the relevant intention, your intention to refer to the dog you are demonstrating, is not overridden by your act of demonstration. Quite the contrary, it is consummated by that act. In respect of *that* intention, you say what you intend to say in uttering ‘That dog is Fido’, namely, that the dog you are pointing at is Fido. Of course you wouldn’t say that if you realized that you are pointing at Spot by mistake (op. cit., p. 143).

That the speaker’s specifically referential intention is consummated by his act of demonstration rather than overridden by it is due to its being part of a communicative intention. This, we saw, is a reflexive intention whose distinctive feature is that its fulfillment consists in its recognition, partly by supposing (in Gricean fashion) that the speaker intends his intention to be recognized.³ This supposition is, in Bach’s view, licensed by the ‘Communicative Presumption’, that utterances are issued with a communicative intention that is recognizable in the context and which is shared among members of the linguistic community (op cit., p. 143; Bach and Harnish 1979, p. 7).

Bach might be right in insisting that members of the linguistic community share this presumption when it comes to the speaker’s illocutionary (and other speech) acts as well as when proper names and other non-demonstrative designators are used. But no such presumption is being relied upon when it comes to the speaker’s specifically referential intention. This is simply because this kind of inten-

3. On the face of it, this characterization of a communicative intention is in line with the view that a reflexive intention is an intention whose fulfillment depends upon and/or is intended to depend upon its recognition, shared among others by Strawson (1964a), Searle (1969) and Lewis (1969) regarding those intentions that they are (respectively) concerned with. However, the ‘in Gricean fashion’ qualification betrays that Bach is here adopting a stronger view, embraced by him elsewhere, that a communicative intention is a reflexive intention in the sense of Grice (1957), i.e., an intention that is intended to be recognized as intended to be recognized, which is to say that it includes the intention that *it itself* be recognized (See Bach and Harnish 1979, pp. xiv-xv; also Blackburn 1984, pp. 114-17, and Recanati 1987, #44). As the argument of the present paper establishes that the speaker’s specifically referential intention is not reflexive, it also makes clear that the speaker’s (relevant) communicative intention in the weaker sense is not reflexive whereas one in the stronger sense is not possible at all.

tion is not *itself* reflexive and thereby not semantically significant, which can be shown as follows.

Note first that, unlike the speaker's demonstration, the linguistic meaning of a demonstrative expression is taken by Bach to be semantically significant (to the extent to which it determines, i.e., delimits the reference). Consequently, the specifically referential intention accompanying his utterance of a demonstrative expression is not meant to be reflexive. Hence, it is distinct from the specifically referential intention accompanying his demonstration. We shall see that this is not true, but suppose for the sake of argument that it is. Suppose that the linguistic meaning of the demonstrative (phrase) that the speaker is using to refer to a certain object is accompanied by an intention similar to, but separate from, his intention to refer to what he is demonstrating. This, then, is an intention to refer to the kind of thing that this utterance, by virtue of its linguistic meaning, (partly) delimits. While uttering the demonstrative sentence 'That dog is Fido', the speaker is (presumably) intending to refer to the kind of thing that the linguistic meaning of the contained demonstrative phrase is meant to (partly) delimit on the given occasion (i.e., a dog in general and not an object of a different kind).

Granting this intention, it is apparent that it is not reflexive, i.e., that the speaker does not intend and expect his audience to recognize it and rely upon it in order to identify a certain object as the referent. The speaker is, as a matter of fact, relying upon the given utterance of the demonstrative phrase as playing its part in referring (the supplementary part being played by other factors). For it is constitutive of his having this intention that he is taking this utterance to be (doing its part in) determining the reference. Without this, the speaker could not have this very intention since it is simply his intention to refer (as a matter of speaker reference) to the conventional referent of the given utterance. In the example given, he is having the intention to refer to the dog by means of the expression 'that dog' only because he is taking this expression as a referring term endowed with the semantic role of (partly) delimiting a particular dog, rather than, say, as being a meaningless sound. As a result, he is not expecting and intending his audience to recognize and rely upon this intention. It is therefore the linguistic meaning of this utterance (together with other factors) rather than the presumed referential intention of the

speaker, that is semantically significant. That is, it (partly) determines reference in the sense of making it the case that a certain object is being referred to.

It is not difficult to see now that the same should apply to the speaker's specifically referential intention accompanying his demonstration (assumed so far to be distinct from the former one). As this is his intention to refer (as a matter of speaker reference) to what he is demonstrating, it is constitutive of his having it that he is taking, and relying upon, his accompanying gesture as playing the semantic role of determining the reference (by way of demonstrating). Without this he could not even have this intention. For he is having it only because he is taking his gesture as a semantically significant act of *demonstration* and not as, say, an act of flexing his arm muscle.

It might be objected that this still does not establish that this intention is not at all semantically significant, since it is *prima facie* possible that *both* this intention and demonstration are (jointly) semantically significant. In accordance with Bach's 'Communicative Presumption', this would be to say the following: while the speaker is using, e.g., a certain gesture as determining the referent for his audience, he is also taking – as well as intending and expecting his audience to recognize and rely upon, on the basis of his (signaling) gesture – his accompanying specifically referential intention as determining the very same referent. (It is as if his gesture needs to be aided by this intention in order to achieve this). This is, however, implausible. Given that the speaker is already taking, and relying upon, his gesture to be determining the reference (in the semantic sense), there is no reason for him to engage in the latter kind of exercise.⁴ It therefore follows that his specifically referential intention is not semantically significant. The same applies to those cases in which demonstration is not required. If the speaker has the intention to refer to what the relevant source of salience makes readily identifi-

4. As far as the determination of demonstrative reference is concerned, together with the results of the next section, this shows that all those accounts holding that the existence of a communicative convention implies the existence of a reflexive intention are wrong. It is to be noted, though, that Lewis (1969) and Bach and Harnish (1979), who subscribe to this view, can be right in applying it to those aspects of linguistic communication that they are concerned with given that they do not deal with issues of demonstrative reference.

able, then he is taking, and relying upon, this source of salience to be itself playing this role. This means that it is the relevant sources of salience and not the presumed referential intention that is semantically significant.

Not only does this show that Bach is wrong in claiming that the specifically referential intention accompanying the speaker's demonstration is reflexive and thereby semantically significant, it also reveals an inconsistency on his part in that he is not willing to take its counterpart accompanying the linguistic meaning as a reflexive intention in spite of its being in the relevant respects similar to the former.

It is in fact wrong to talk about two different intentions here as I have assumed in order to come to terms with Bach's argument. For, in uttering a demonstrative (phrase) the speaker is relying upon its linguistic meaning's semantic role as not separate from that played by the demonstration (as well as by the other supplementary paralinguistic cues). The reference of a demonstrative expression is rather a matter of their joint contribution.⁵ Neither the linguistic meaning of an utterance of a demonstrative (phrase) nor the speaker's demonstration (or some other source of salience) have their semantic role in isolation from the other. An utterance of the sentence 'That dog is Fido' is significant as an utterance of a sentence involving a demonstrative (phrase) having the role of referring to an appropriately given object only in so far as it bonds with relevant paralinguistic cues, and vice versa.

Accordingly, the speaker has only one specifically referential intention here. This is the intention to refer to what his utterance together with the supplementary paralinguistic cues is determining as the reference (which is not reflexive). And the 'Communicative Presumption' amounts to the presumption – shared by members of the linguistic community – that utterances, including paralinguistic cues, are issued with a communicative intention that their semantic role be recognizable in the context.

5. This is in line with Kaplan's claim (1989, p. 490) that the linguistic rules which govern the use of true demonstratives assume that an associated demonstration (which in his view can also be opportune, requiring no special action on the speaker's part) accompanies each (demonstrative) use of a demonstrative.

III

To have the specifically referential intention the speaker must assume that the involved linguistic and paralinguistic cues refer uniquely. This is to say that when he utters a demonstrative sentence accompanied by the relevant paralinguistic cues this complies with standard requirements concerning the unique determination of reference in the given context.⁶

It is understood though that the speaker might fail to use these cues to refer uniquely. Suppose that he utters the demonstrative sentence 'That dog needs to be vaccinated', using the contained demonstrative phrase aided by the relevant paralinguistic cues to refer to the dog in front of him, Fido. But the very same token of these cues could on the very same occasion also target another dog, Spot, if as in the case discussed by Reimer (op. cit.) and Bach (op. cit.) Fido and Spot were frolicking about in such a way that either of them could have been referred to. Similarly, the linguistic and paralinguistic cues relied upon by the speaker could simultaneously target both Fido and Spot - as in the case where they are curled up together - and the hearer takes these cues to be targeting Spot. And, as the usual way of removing the indeterminacy or misunderstanding that thus arises is by asking the speaker which object he is talking about, it might seem that it is this intention to refer to one rather than to the other object that is semantically significant, at least in cases such as these.

To be sure, the intention in question is the speaker's directing or perceptual intention.⁷ It is the speaker's intention aimed at a per-

6. Features conventionally playing a part in the determination of demonstrative reference for the hearer are numerous. In addition to the expressions accompanying the demonstrative (including their gender), the predicate of the demonstrative sentence can also be significant. Another such feature is the conversational background of the conversers (as captured by e.g., Strawson's (1964b) principle of the presumption of knowledge and the principle of relevance). The fact that in the process of the determination of the referent the speaker's demonstration normally overrides other features of context is a matter of further semantic conventions.

7. Note that the object that the speaker has in mind *qua* an object that he has

ceived object even if he is intending to refer to this object only because he has mistaken it for some other object that he has in mind. If, in the circumstances described, the speaker has in fact mistaken Fido, the perceived dog, for a third dog, Ares, who happens to be outside his perceptual field, the intention at issue is the intention to refer to the perceived dog – the dog meant to be singled out by the given referential devices, i.e., Fido, and not his intention to refer to Ares, the dog he has in mind.

However, like the speaker's intention to refer to the object that he has in mind – which may but need not be the same as the object aimed at by his directing intention – his directing intention is neither sufficient nor necessary for the determination of demonstrative reference. That the former intention is not sufficient to determine reference means that, in the circumstances described, he could have referred to Spot by means of the utilized referential devices, while at the same time intending these devices to refer to Fido, the dog he had in mind. And that it is not necessary means that Spot, the dog that he did not have in mind, could have been referred to.⁸ Similarly, the speaker's directing intention is not sufficient to determine reference since the speaker could, e.g., have been pointing to Spot while, as noted above, Fido, the dog that is beside Spot, is the dog on which he is 'focused'. Neither is it necessary, since Spot, the dog on which the speaker is not 'focused', could have been referred to. This reveals two things. Firstly, the very possibility of referring to what is not intended to be referred to makes it the case that the speaker having either of these intentions is taking, and relying upon, the utilized (linguistic and paralinguistic) referential devices as semantically significant. For otherwise he would always take the referent to be the object selected by these intentions rather than the one picked out by these devices. Secondly, and for the same reason, these intentions are not semantically significant even in conjunction with these devices since they are not reflexive. For reflexivity requires that the referent always be (taken to be) the intended object. (We also saw

in mind plays no role here since the resolution of the indeterminacy in question is achieved by appealing to the object aimed at by his directing intention (which he takes to be the object that he has in mind).

8. See Wettstein (1984), p. 71, for a similar remark.

above that “you do not intend your audience to recognize your intention to refer to Fido; if you were, then saying ‘That dog is Fido’ could not be informative” (Bach, 1992, p.143)).

It is part of this description of the speaker’s linguistic competence that the speaker’s directing intention is not reflexive even when he fails to use the given referential devices to refer uniquely, as in the case described above. For he has intended them to refer uniquely, rather than intending and expecting his audience to recognize the given intention. It is true that upon prompting by the hearer’s query, the speaker, in this kind of case, will normally accomplish the communication between them about a certain object by spelling out which object his directing intention is aimed at. To achieve this, he might even say ‘I *intend* to refer to this dog’, while clearly demonstrating Fido, thus resolving the indeterminacy that had arisen. Yet, he has only provided more standard referential devices rather than turning his directing intention into a reflexive one. (For his linguistic competence presupposes the possibility of the mismatch between the referent singled out by these devices and the intended referent; he could have still mistaken Spot, or some other dog, for Fido.) The same applies to the foregoing case in which the speaker’s directing intention is aimed at Fido, whereas the hearer takes him to be referring to Spot.

It is then not true that the speaker’s referential intentions are semantically significant while the associated demonstration (or some other source of salience) is not, be that his directing intention, his intention to refer to an object that he has in mind, or the specifically referential intention. What is more, demonstrative reference is not determined by any of these intentions, but rather by the relevant linguistic and paralinguistic devices.⁹

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