

# Kripke *contra* Kripke - Semantic Reference as Conventionalized Speaker's Reference

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## Abstract

I argue that Kripke's construal of the distinction between speaker's reference and semantic reference, in 'Speaker's reference and semantic reference' (1977), in conjunction with an intuitive view of the nature of conventions, implies a theory of semantic reference that is distinct from his causal theory. On this theory, semantic reference is conventionalized speaker's reference. The argument concerning Kripke has two general implications. First, any theory that features a notion of speaker's reference will have great difficulty in avoiding the view that semantic reference is conventionalized speaker's reference. Second, theories that deny that there is a viable notion of speaker's reference, and thereby deny that semantic reference is conventionalized speaker's reference, will face an uphill battle in meeting certain general constraints originating in the theory of conventions.

## 1 Introduction

I define the notion of the *speaker's reference* of a communicative device as the object of the communicative intention of the speaker in using the communicative device<sup>1</sup>. A theory of the nature of semantic reference is a *Conventionalized*

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<sup>1</sup>The formulation in terms of a *communicative device* is meant to accommodate cases where the communicative act is non-linguistic (e.g. a glance). I will not, in this paper, try

*Speaker's Reference* view (hereafter, CSR view) if, and only if, the theory analyzes semantic reference in terms of speaker's reference and convention. The CSR view can be expressed as follows:

CSR view: a designator  $D$  semantically refers to an object  $o$  within a linguistic community  $L$  if, and only if, members of  $L$  follow the convention of using  $D$  to speaker-refer to  $o$ <sup>2</sup>.

In this paper I argue that Kripke's construal of the relation between speaker's reference and semantic reference, in 'Speaker's reference and semantic reference' (1977), in conjunction with an intuitive view of the nature of conventions, implies a theory of semantic reference that is distinct from his causal theory, namely a CSR view of semantic reference. The argument concerning Kripke has two general implications. First, any theory that features a notion of speaker's reference will have great difficulty in avoiding the view that semantic reference is conventionalized speaker's reference. Second, theories that deny that there is a viable notion of speaker's reference, and thereby deny that semantic reference is conventionalized speaker's reference, will face an uphill battle in meeting certain general constraints originating in the theory of conventions.

In section two I argue that Kripke's construal of the distinction between speaker's reference and semantic reference leads to a CSR view. In section three I show that the CSR view is distinct from Kripkean causalism, and in section four I answer an objection to the argument based on the fact that Kripke defines speaker's reference in terms of semantic reference. In section five I discuss two general implications of the argument concerning Kripke.

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to establish what makes an intention communicative, e.g. whether such an intention, and the resulting communicative action, must be understood in term of Gricean reflexive intentions or not.

<sup>2</sup>See Stine (1977) for an early example of a Grice-inspired CSR view. For a discussion of CSR views in general, see Smit (2024).

## 2 From speaker's reference to CSR

Below I present the argument and discuss each of the claims involved.

(1) Semantic reference is conventionally determined reference.

Premise (1) should be read as stating that, for an object  $o$  to be the semantic referent of a designator  $D$ , is a matter of there being a linguistic convention that pairs  $D$  with  $o$ . What we take the nature of this pairing to be will depend on what we take the relation of semantic reference to consist in.

Kripke writes:

If a speaker has a designator in his idiolect, certain conventions of his idiolect (given various facts about the world) determine the referent in the idiolect: that I call the semantic referent of the designator (Kripke, 1977: 263).

In the above passage Kripke states that he uses the phrase 'semantic reference' to talk about conventionally determined reference. So presumably Kripke would not object to (1)<sup>3</sup>.

(2) For any convention, there must be an action-in-a-context that counts as acting in accordance with it.

(2) should be read as saying that, in order to follow a convention, someone must perform a specific action in the context that gives rise to the coordination problem that the convention resolves. Call this required action-in-a-context the *compliance condition* of the convention. In this way someone who follows the convention of driving on the left-hand side of the road in the United Kingdom must perform the action of driving on the left-hand side within the context

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<sup>3</sup>There are, of course, theorists who do not hold that semantic reference is conventionally determined reference, e.g. Davidson (1986), Almog (2014). Where I draw some general lessons from the reasoning concerning Kripke, I treat such authors as excluded from my analysis.

of driving in the United Kingdom. This action-in-a-context is the compliance condition of the driving convention operative in the United Kingdom.

Note that any theory of semantic reference that accepts premise (1) incurs the explanatory burden of stating a compliance condition consistent with the theory.

(3) If a convention holds between a group of agents, then the existence of the convention consists in those agents being disposed to coordinate their behavior by acting in accordance with the compliance condition of the convention.

(3) should be read as a principle concerning the ontology of conventions, call it the *constitution principle*. The constitution principle states that the existence of a convention consists in nothing over and above the fact that the parties to a convention are disposed to coordinate their behavior by acting in accordance with the compliance condition of it. In this way the fact that there is a convention to drive on the left-hand side of the road in the United Kingdom consists in nothing over and above the fact that individual drivers in the United Kingdom are disposed to coordinate their behavior by driving on the left-hand side of the road.

I portray the inclinations of the coordinating agents as a disposition in order to capture the fact that the convention still exists even when no-one is currently acting in accordance with it. The reference to ‘coordination’ is supposed to capture the fact that agents have to be disposed to perform the relevant action *qua* complying with a convention. Opinions as to what exactly it would be to comply *qua* complying with a convention will differ<sup>4</sup>, but as a bare minimum it must mean that an individual agent’s compliance must be conditional on the

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<sup>4</sup>The canonical treatment is in Lewis (1969). I follow Lewis in his central claim that conventions should be thought of as solutions to recurring problems of coordination. Where I deviate from Lewis, it is because I find the arguments in Miller (1992) compelling. Nothing in the argument is affected by such deviation.

compliance of other agents who are party to the convention.

What is important for our purposes is that the constitutive principle is a ‘bottom up’ ontology of conventions. It claims that facts about conventions are just facts about the compliance conditions that agents<sup>5</sup> are disposed to fulfill in order to coordinate their behavior.

(4) Kripke’s construal of the distinction between semantic reference and speaker’s reference implies that the compliance condition of a convention that stipulates  $D$  to be the semantic referent of  $o$  is to use  $D$  to speaker-refer to  $o$ .

Kripke, in ‘Speaker’s reference and semantic reference’ (1977), stated the distinction between speaker’s reference and semantic reference as follows:

So, we may tentatively define the speaker’s referent of a designator to be that object which the speaker wishes to talk about, on a given occasion, and believes fulfills the conditions for being the semantic referent of the designator (Kripke, 1977: 264).

On Kripke’s definition of speaker’s reference, above, an object needs to satisfy two conditions in order to be the speaker’s referent of a designator. The first condition is an *intentional* condition, namely that it must be the object that the speaker wishes to talk about<sup>6</sup>. The second condition is an *epistemic* condition, namely that the speaker must believe that the object is also the semantic referent of the designator.

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<sup>5</sup>Agents will typically be persons, but need not be. If a convention holds among supra-individual entities (e.g. countries, corporations), then it remains the case that the existence of the convention is ontologically just a matter of what each supra-individual entity is disposed to do in order to coordinate. Agents can also be time-slices of persons, as in cases of individual conventions, i.e. where a person coordinates their current behavior with their future behavior. See Ross (2002).

<sup>6</sup>This raises the question of what ‘talking about’ an object would consist in. Presumably this notion is a placeholder for a full theory on this topic, in much the same way as the term ‘communicative’, as used in my definition of the notion of ‘communicative intention’, is a placeholder that serves to mark a position of needed theoretical development.

Kripke portrays the use of a name as an intentional act whereby the speaker identifies the object that they wish to talk about, and then chooses a name that they believe semantically refers to that object. Kripke, of course, is not trying to state the compliance condition of a naming convention. Yet his construal of speaker's reference amounts to the statement of such a compliance condition. It commits him to the claim that a speaker performs a specific *action* in a specific *context* in order to *coordinate* their linguistic behavior. The *action* involved is the action of uttering a specific name. The *context* is that of a situation where the speaker wishes to talk about that specific object within a specific linguistic community. Kripke's portrayal of the speaker, as using the designator due to a belief that the object that they wish to talk about by using the designator is also the semantic referent of the designator, implies that the speaker is trying to *coordinate* their behavior with this specific linguistic community.

The above construal of the action-in-a-context, whereby the speaker complies with linguistic convention, counts Kripke's intentional condition as context-specifying, i.e. as determining the relevant action-in-a-context, but does not count Kripke's epistemic condition as context-specifying in this way. I will only justify treating these two conditions as different in kind in section four. For now, note that, so construed, Kripke portrays name-users as complying with a naming convention by using the name conventionally paired with the object when they wish to talk about that object. Formulated as a compliance condition, this amounts to the view that the compliance condition of a convention whereby  $o$  is the semantic referent of  $D$ , is to use  $D$  when you wish to talk about  $o$ .

(5) If the compliance condition of a convention whereby  $o$  is the semantic referent of  $D$  is to use  $D$  when you wish to talk about  $o$ , then semantic reference is conventionalized speaker's reference.

(5) follows in virtue of the constitution principle. The existence of a convention

consists in nothing over and above the fact that parties to a convention are disposed to act in accordance with the compliance condition of the convention. This implies that if the compliance condition of the conventional fact that  $o$  is the semantic referent of  $D$ , is to use  $D$  when they wish to talk about  $o$ , then the fact that  $o$  is the semantic referent of  $D$  consists in nothing over and above the fact that users of  $D$  are disposed to coordinate their behavior by using  $D$  when they wish to talk about  $o$ . Formulated in terms of the notion of speaker's reference used in this paper (i.e. one that does not include an epistemic condition), this implies that semantic reference is nothing over and above conventionalized speaker's reference.

The core of the argument is simple and, I hope, intuitive. The constitution principle provides the link whereby, once the action-in-a-context required to follow a convention is fixed, the facts that the existence of the convention consists in are also thereby fixed. This general principle concerning conventions, applied to the case of naming, then implies that, if the matter of following a name-governing convention is a matter of speaker-referring, then the existence of the convention consists in nothing over and above the coordination of such speaker-referring. This is so for the same reason as, if to follow a driving convention is to drive on a specific side of the road, the existence of the relevant driving convention can consist in nothing over and above coordinating to drive on that side of the road.

### 3 The CSR view and causalism

Kripke's *causal theory* states that a name  $N$  semantically refers to an object  $o$  if, and only if,  $o$  was baptized  $N$  at the beginning of the causal chain from which the user of  $N$  inherited  $N$  (Kripke 1981: 96)<sup>7</sup>. If the reasoning offered in

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<sup>7</sup>Though it is common to gloss his theory in this way, Kripke, of course, denies that he is offering a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for semantic reference (1981: 95). The

section two, however, is correct, then the construal of the distinction between speaker's reference and semantic reference in Kripke (1977) commits him to a CSR view of semantic reference.

The most important way such a view differs from Kripke's causal theory is that it does not, as Kripke's theory is typically interpreted, portray a causal chain stretching to a baptized individual as part of the 'mechanism of reference'<sup>8</sup> itself. Causal chains of the Kripkean type will still exist, but their existence becomes a trivial matter of the epistemology of convention-acquisition. We typically learn the content of a naming convention *via* causal interaction with others, and this epistemic process results in the existence of causal chains stretching back to baptismal events. On the CSR view, however, this is no more surprising than the fact that our knowledge of the convention to drive on the left-hand side of the road in the United Kingdom has been acquired *via* a causal process that results in the existence of a causal chain of knowledge transmission that links back to the event whereby the United Kingdom's driving convention originated. The past is no longer part of the mechanism of reference, instead the past is relegated to an explanation of why we have the conventions that we do.

The different way in which the past features in the CSR view, compared to the causal theory, provides the CSR view with an elegant strategy for dealing with a perennial objection to his theory,<sup>9</sup> namely cases of reference-switching<sup>10</sup>

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issues he mentions that stop him from offering such a theory, however, pertain to the kinds of intentions required to render the relevant causal chain appropriate for the transfer of semantic reference (1981: 95 - 97). These issues do not affect the argument here; I ignore them for present purposes. Also see footnote 11.

<sup>8</sup>The locution 'mechanism of reference' is widespread. Putnam, for example, writes:

Kripke's work has come to me second hand; even so, I owe him a large debt for suggesting the idea of causal chains as the mechanism of reference (1975: 198).

My own view is that the typical interpretation of Kripke's theory as providing a 'mechanism of reference' is incorrect and that, on close examination, Kripkean causalism turns out to be trivial. See Smit (2023).

<sup>9</sup>I won't here discuss other causalist views, e.g. Devitt (1981), that attempt to solve this problem.

<sup>10</sup>The modern use of 'Madagascar' as referring to the island off the coast of Africa is due



(Evans, 1973)<sup>11</sup>. As the CSR view treats the relevance of the past as merely epistemic, fidelity to the past is no longer an absolute virtue. Lewis portrays conventions as responses to recurrent games of coordination (Lewis, 1969). Coordination games are subject to network effects; if a critical mass of parties to a convention unwittingly violate a convention in the same way, then at some point the best way, for an individual agent, to achieve coordination is to follow them in their violation, and so the violation spreads to all users. Once the efforts required to restore fidelity to the past is no longer worthwhile, the disposition to follow the original convention disappears in favor of what becomes the new convention<sup>12</sup>. In this way the CSR view is well-equipped to explain how ‘Madagascar’ can come to semantically refer to Madagascar, even once we recognize Marco Polo’s mistake.

Kripke ends ‘Speaker’s reference and semantic reference’ with the following remark.

I think that the distinction between semantic reference and speaker’s reference will [...] be of considerable constructive importance for a

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to Marco Polo, who, according to most scholars (Oliver, 1977: 219) confused the Somalian port city of Mogadishu with the island off the coast of Africa. Marco Polo’s mistaken use spread throughout Europe and so it came about that a phonetically corrupted use of the name ‘Mogadishu’ now semantically refers to the island off the coast of Africa, instead of, as the causal theory would seem to predict, Mogadishu.

<sup>11</sup>While it is common to interpret Kripke’s theory as predicting that ‘Madagascar’ semantically refers to Mogadishu, one could question this by casting doubt on whether the users of ‘Madagascar’ satisfy Kripke’s requirement that they must use ‘Madagascar’ with the intention of using it as previous users did (Kripke, 1981: 96). This issue need not detain us here. Even if one did not interpret Kripke as committed to saying that ‘Madagascar’ semantically refers to Mogadishu, reference-switches remain a problem for Kripke as his theory does not predict that ‘Madagascar’ semantically refers to Madagascar. The CSR view does.

<sup>12</sup>The crux of the argument that appealing to speaker intentions to explain shifts in reference renders the causal chains redundant was clearly stated by Dummett (in a 1974 discussion with Kripke):

[P]eople regard themselves, in using a name or species name, as responsible to the linguistic practices of other people who speak the same language. So if their method of recognizing the bearer diverges, and particularly if it diverges so far as to give a different extension, then they’re prepared to yield. But all they’re responsible to is the practices accepted of that language at their time. They’re not responsible to what people said 100 years ago, or 600 years ago, at all. I think that completely falls away (Dummett et al., 1974: 517).

I would like to thank an anonymous referee for bringing this passage to my attention.

theory of language. In particular, I find it plausible that a diachronic account of the evolution of language is likely to suggest that what was originally a mere speaker's reference may, if it becomes habitual in a community, evolve into a semantic reference (1977: 271).

The CSR view portrays semantic reference as habitual speaker's reference. If the argument offered here is correct, then Kripke's remark pointed the way, not only to a strategy for dealing with phenomena viewed as recalcitrant from the perspective of the causal theory, but to a distinct theory of semantic reference.

## 4 Kripke's epistemic condition

There is reason to doubt the virtue of including an epistemic condition in the definition of speaker's reference. While a rational speaker will only use a designator to communicate *via* linguistic convention if they believe that the object of their communicative intention is the semantic referent of the designator, there seems little to be gained from including such an epistemic condition in the very *definition* of speaker's reference. The fact that the utterer of a designator will act in this way follows from the rationality of the utterer, independently of whether it is a definitional requirement of speaker's reference. By analogy, the user of a garden fork will only use the garden fork to loosen soil if they believe that the garden fork is suitable for loosening soil, yet we are not tempted to require that such a belief be included as a condition in the very definition of the notion of a garden fork<sup>13</sup>.

Note, furthermore, that nothing in Kripke's argument against Donnellan, or any other issue in Kripke (1977), requires that such an epistemic condition

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<sup>13</sup>A further problem is that Kripke's formulation of the epistemic condition implies that his view cannot apply to cases where the speaker partially uses a pragmatic mechanism to facilitate communication. For consider the case where a friend of mine has been playing excellent golf, and I use the name 'Tiger Woods' to speaker-refer to him. In such a case I will not have the belief that speaker's reference and semantic reference coincides.

be definitionally included. His arguments would be unaffected if his epistemic condition was portrayed as a claim about the conditions under which a rational speaker would use a designator, and not as a matter that is constitutive of speaker's reference.

Within the current dialectic, Kripke's inclusion of an epistemic condition in his definition of speaker's reference also seems to lead to an insuperable problem, as pointed out by Bianchi (2019). Given that Kripke explicitly uses the notion of *semantic* reference in his construal of *speaker's* reference, it would seem that such a definition cannot be used to construct a view in which semantic reference is then defined in terms of speaker's reference. This problem leads Bianchi to argue that Kripke's formulation of the distinction is incompatible with CSR-type views (2019: 437).<sup>14</sup> Bianchi phrases his objection as follows:

[A]ccording to Kripke's definition a speaker cannot refer to *b* by using a designator *c* if he or she does not believe of *b* that it is the semantic referent of *c*. But, in order to believe of something that it is the semantic referent of something else, of course the speaker needs to have the concept of semantic reference. Since it is scarcely imaginable that one has this concept without there being semantic reference, we must then conclude that speaker's reference presupposes semantic reference: the second clause in Kripke's definition rules out the possibility of explaining the latter in terms of the former (and this, let me add, renders Kripke's distinction much less Gricean than he himself alleged it was). In a nutshell: according to Kripke's definition *there could not be speaker's reference if there were not semantic reference* (2019: 437).

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<sup>14</sup>Bianchi's argument occurs in the broader context of an argument against the idea that there is a useful distinction to be drawn between speaker's reference and semantic reference. Bianchi rejects the idea that "reference comes in two sorts" (2019: 446); reference is *semantic* reference.

While Bianchi’s argument may seem compelling, I do not think that it succeeds. The first thing to notice is that Kripke, in the section where the distinction between speaker’s reference and semantic reference is formulated, takes great pains to formulate the theoretical notions used in his argument in a theory-neutral way. This can be seen in his formulation of semantic reference in terms of ‘idiolects’ (Kripke, 1977: 263), presumably in order to remain neutral between descriptivist and non-descriptivist views, and also from the fact that, when he does wish to talk about his own views about semantic reference, he explicitly distinguishes it as such by talking about these views as the views “advocated in *Naming and Necessity*” (Kripke, 1977: 273). That Kripke’s formulations are supposed to be theory-neutral is common cause between Bianchi and myself; Bianchi notes both passages mentioned above and also interprets them as Kripke’s attempt to formulate his distinction between speaker’s reference and semantic reference in a way that does not presuppose any theoretically interesting commitments (Bianchi, 2019: 429).

There is a problem, however, with interpreting Kripke as trying to draw his distinction in a theory-neutral way, yet claiming that Kripke’s distinction serves to rule out CSR-like views. For, if Kripke’s definition of speaker’s reference is not supposed to contain any interesting theoretical commitments, then we would expect it to be compatible with a CSR view. And, in fact, the CSR theorist who uses Kripke’s formulation of the notion of speaker’s reference can cash it out in the following way:

So, we may tentatively define the speaker’s referent of a designator to be that object which the speaker wishes to talk about, on a given occasion, and believes fulfills [the condition of being the object that other members of the speaker’s coordinating community indicate that they wish to talk about by using the designator, in virtue of

coordinating to do so].

The above construal of speaker's reference is Kripke's original formulation, but with the neutral formulation of the content of the belief operative in the epistemic condition ("fulfills the conditions for being the semantic referent of the designator"), replaced, in square brackets, with an explicitly CSR construal of the content of such a belief. It should be evident that inserting an explicitly CSR version of the epistemic condition into Kripke's conception of speaker's reference does not introduce any obvious incoherence. This implies that Bianchi's claim that "the second clause in Kripke's definition rules out the possibility of explaining the latter in terms of the former" (Bianchi 2019: 437) is too strong; on the above formulation, speaker's reference is not dependent on a prior notion of semantic reference that is distinct in kind. Instead, the notion of semantic reference is cashed out in a manner consistent with a CSR view, and presupposes nothing beyond it. Unless we explicitly work with a conception of semantic reference on which it is irreducible to speaker's reference, there is no principled problem with the CSR theorist including Kripke's epistemic condition in a conception of speaker's reference<sup>15</sup>. And, of course, if the objector does take semantic reference to be irreducible to speaker's reference in this way, then doing so begs the question against the CSR theorist.

The claim defended in this paper, however, is not merely that Kripke's distinction between speaker's reference and semantic reference is *compatible* with a CSR views. Instead the view defended is that Kripke's distinction, coupled with certain unexceptional principles concerning conventions, inevitably *leads* to a CSR view. This idea can only be defended if it is the case that we are forced to construe Kripke's epistemic condition in a CSR way, as formulated

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<sup>15</sup>Bianchi also argues that the introduction of the notion of speaker's reference into philosophy of language was poorly motivated (2019: 431 - 434). As his argument does not affect the dialectic about what Kripke's formulation of the distinction between speaker's reference and semantic reference implies, I will not discuss the argument here.

above.

In support of the idea that Kripke's epistemic condition, when viewed in light of the principles concerning conventions discussed earlier, *must* be cashed out in a CSR way, note that Kripke's epistemic condition is a *belief about general compliance*. The need for such beliefs arises from the fact that any agent who is a party to a convention can only rationally follow the convention if they believe that others are similarly following the convention. For such parties to a convention are attempting to coordinate, and the goods arising from coordination can only be reliably realized when such coordination does, in fact, take place. In this way I can only drive on the left-hand side of the road in the UK *qua* following a convention if I believe that others are doing similarly. Such action, if rational, presupposes a belief about general compliance.

The fact that Kripke's epistemic condition concerns a belief about general compliance implies that the two conditions that Kripke uses to define speaker's reference, when viewed from the perspective of the general theory of conventions, are very different in kind. Kripke's intentional condition serves to specify the context in which the coordination problem occurs, i.e. speakers who wish to talk about a specific *o* must settle on a specific designator in order to do so, in the same way that those who wish to drive in the UK must settle on a side of the road to drive on. Kripke's epistemic condition, however, is not a context-specifier in this way. A context, in the sense relevant to conventions, is the set of real-world features that constitute the problem of coordination that gives rise to the convention. That, however, is not the role of the relevant belief here; the belief is not one of the features that constitute the coordination problem, rather it is a belief about an existent solution to the problem of coordination posed by such features. Simply put, the belief is *about* the coordination problem and the solution to it, it is not *part* of the coordination problem.

The above reasoning has two implications for the argument offered here. First, it serves to justify the exclusion of Kripke’s epistemic condition from the statement of the compliance condition in section two. Second, the fact that the belief relevant to the epistemic condition is a belief about general compliance highly constrains the content of the relevant belief. So construed, it can be no more than a belief to the effect that others members of my coordinating community *are acting as I do* in the context of coordination. It follows, if we accept that the action-in-a-context that counts as following the convention governing a specific designator  $D$  is that of uttering  $D$  when we wish to talk about  $o$ , that the belief about general compliance must therefore be a belief to the effect that others similarly use  $D$  when they wish to talk about  $o$ , and in virtue of coordinating<sup>16</sup> to do so. In the same way, then, the belief that  $o$  is the semantic referent of  $D$  can be no more than the belief that  $o$  satisfies the condition of being the object that other members of the speaker’s coordinating community indicate that they wish to talk about by using  $D$ , and in virtue of coordinating to do so.

The upshot of the above reasoning is that, since the belief about general compliance is a belief *about* the action-in-a-context, i.e. the belief that the action-in-a-context is being generally performed in order to coordinate, it can contain no referential notion beyond the notion already contained in the formulation of the action-in-a context, i.e. the notion of ‘wishing to talk about  $o$ ’. The analogy with the convention of driving in the UK is, again, instructive. For any individual, the belief about general compliance concerning driving in the UK would be the belief that others *are doing the same thing* that they are doing, and are doing so in order to coordinate. For this reason the belief about general compliance cannot contain a notion of ‘driving’, or a notion of ‘the UK’, that

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<sup>16</sup>The epistemic condition is best thought of, not as part of the action-in-a-context, but as constitutive of the existence of coordination, and thereby as constitutive of the existence of the convention. As this would not impact its form, I will not pursue the topic here.

is distinct from the notions used in the specification of what the individual is doing.

Once we have fixed the action-in-a-context that counts as following a convention, the content of a belief about general compliance is also thereby fixed, and there can be no novel theoretical dragons lurking in such a belief<sup>17</sup>. For the content of such a belief can be no more than that the relevant action-in-a-context is the operative coordinating solution. Given, then, that the belief relevant to Kripke's epistemic condition is a belief about general compliance, it follows that it has to be cashed out in a CSR way.

## 5 General implications of the argument concerning Kripke

The argument thus far hinges on the implications of two general constraints for the theory of semantic reference. The first constraint is the *compliance condition*, i.e. the fact that, for any convention, there must be some specific act that counts as following it. The second constraint is the *constitution principle*, i.e. the fact that, for any convention, its existence can consist in no more than the fact that agents coordinate their behavior by acting in accordance with the compliance condition.

I have argued that Kripke's construal of the distinction between speaker's reference and semantic reference (Kripke 1977) leads directly to the view that semantic reference is conventionalized speaker's reference. While the argument was couched in terms of Kripke's views, its conclusion only relied on the fact that Kripke offers a notion of speaker's reference, construed in terms of an intentional

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<sup>17</sup>Bianchi argues that reference does not come in two kinds (2019: 446), reference is *semantic* reference. If, as I have argued in this paper, we accept Kripke's construal of the distinction between speaker's reference and semantic reference, then we can endorse Bianchi's claim that reference does not come in two kinds. This, however, is now due to the fact that reference is *speaker's* reference.



condition. This implies that the conclusion is a general one. Any view on which semantic reference is conventional, and on which there is a viable notion of speaker's reference, construed as an object of a communicative intention, will, in conjunction with seemingly unexceptional principles concerning conventions, lead to a CSR view.

Once the theorist commits to such a notion of speaker's reference, their hands are thereby tied in matters concerning semantic reference. This implication, in the final analysis, follows from a more general conclusion. From (1), (2) and (3), it follows that, once we have specified the compliance condition of a reference-determining convention, i.e. what a speaker has to do in a context in order to follow the convention, the nature of semantic reference is thereby fixed. Simply put, once we know what speakers have to do and when, we also know what semantic reference is.

Where does the above leave non-CSR views that do not wish to construe semantic content in terms of intentional states? I can see two broad options for such theories, provided that they still portray semantic reference as conventional. In both cases, however, the argument offered here highlights novel difficulties for theorists pursuing such options.

The first option, if we assume that (2) cannot be usefully denied, would be to accept (3), and attempt to state the compliance condition of the relevant conventions in non-intentional terms. Such a theory can reject the intentional, and thereby mental, notions underlying the CSR view, presumably in favor of some purely behavioral standard like dispositions to action. The problem, however, is that the relevant dispositions to act cannot be formulated in terms of semantic reference. For 'semantically referring' is not an action that individuals can perform; rather it is a collective outcome of individual actions. To claim that an individual semantically refers - in some non-derivative sense<sup>18</sup> - is to commit

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<sup>18</sup>The locution '*S* semantically refers to *o*' is harmless if used in derivative way, i.e if what

a kind of category mistake. We also cannot cash out individual dispositions by merely saying that such dispositions have to be in accordance with the content stipulated by the convention governing the semantic reference of a name. For, as such a view, by stipulation, accepts (3), it follows that there are no semantic notions until individual behavior is given. But it is precisely the task of such a view to specify such individual behavior.

The second option would be to claim that semantic reference is more fundamental than speaker's reference, i.e. that speaker's reference should be explained in terms of semantic reference, if it is to be explained at all. On the assumption that what is true of conventions in general is also true of semantic conventions, such a view rests on a rejection of (3). The problem with rejecting (3), however, would be to make such a view consistent with the commonly endorsed 'bottom up' ontology of conventions deriving from Lewis, or to reject this view of conventions altogether, for such a view amounts to an attempt to construe the *collective* behavior of the members of a coordinating community as somehow ontologically prior to the *individual* behavior of the members of that community. Any 'language-first' view stands in deep tension to how we ordinarily think of conventions in general, for the language-first view is also a 'collective-first' view, and it would be the considerable task of the language-first theorist to resolve this tension.

## 6 Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that Kripke's notion of speaker's reference, and specifically his intentional condition, in conjunction with certain principles con-

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is meant is that  $S$  uses a designator  $D$ , and  $D$  semantically refers to  $o$ . The theorist who accepts (2), however, cannot use it to state the compliance condition of a name-governing convention. For it would amount to an attempt to characterize a collective outcome, namely semantic reference, in terms of individual behaviour that is already characterized in terms of this collective outcome.

cerning conventions, leads directly to a CSR view of semantic reference. I showed that such a view clashes with his causal theory and further argued that, since the belief relevant to his epistemic condition is a belief about general compliance, we are forced to understand this belief in a CSR way. In the same way, all theorists who take there to be a viable notion of speaker's reference - and who accept the general constraints concerning conventions discussed in this paper - are thereby committed to a CSR view of semantic reference.

The CSR view, while distinct from Grice in that it concerns not sentences, but sub-sentential expressions, shares the theoretical spirit of Grice (1968). As such it is open to the perennial objection to Grice, namely that it portrays speaker intentions, and hence mental content, as prior to semantic content. The CSR view, however, while incurring the theoretical cost of explaining mental content as prior to semantic content, has the virtue of being able to give an account of what following a reference-determining convention consists in, and also of being consistent with a bottom-up ontology of conventions. Portraying speaker's reference as prior to semantic reference does, admittedly, only serve to push the mystery of reference back to the matter of mental content. If the CSR view is correct, however, then this at least constitutes a degree of progress. The task is to locate the mystery where it belongs, even if this does not solve all problems at once.

## **Author declarations**

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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