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## REVIEW

Kent Bach  
Department of Philosophy  
San Francisco State University  
San Francisco, CA 94132

*Reference and Referent Accessibility*, Thorstein Fretheim and Jeanette K. Gundel (eds). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins. 1996.

Most of the papers in this volume are concerned in one way or another with the correlation between two hierarchies. One hierarchy, the so-called givenness hierarchy, concerns types of referring expressions, ranging from indexical pronouns (and zero pronouns, in some languages) to indefinite descriptions. The other is the accessibility hierarchy of objects of reference, ranging from things immediately present and prominent to items far removed, both in space and relevance, from the context of discourse. Some of these papers, including those by such major contributors to this field as Mira Ariel, Wallace Chafe, Jeanette Gundel, and Ellen Prince, address general aspects of this correlation. Others deal with how this correlation is realized in particular languages, including Finnish, Hebrew, Mandarin, and Vietnamese, and focus on specific types of expressions or constructions, such as zero pronouns, indefinites, proper names, and topicalization. The latter papers tend to be more descriptive and statistical than theoretical. Many interesting and contrasting examples are discussed, typically sentences or pairs of sentences, and the data also include large chunks of written discourse, generally analyzed statistically.

The papers in this volume investigate the cues on which the listener relies to

identify the referent from the referring expression used by the speaker. Unfortunately, they neglect the fact that this process is part and parcel of the process of recognizing the speaker's entire communicative intention (also, their discussions of anaphora ignore syntactic constraints, of the sort posited in binding theory). Appeal is made to such cognitive concepts as accessibility, activation, and memory (both short- and long-term), under the rubric of "cognitive status," but there is insufficient appreciation that communication is not only a complex cognitive process (as vision is, for example) but also a process of strategic interaction.

This is a serious criticism. These papers pay a great deal of attention to differences among referring expressions in what they signal to the hearer concerning the accessibility of the referent. However, they disregard Grice's fundamental insight that understanding an utterance involves taking into account the fact that the speaker intends one to understand it (it is ironic that this insight underlies the thesis of the very paper (Gundel, Hedberg, and Zacharski 1993) that stimulated much of the work in this volume). One's inference to the speaker's intention is always constrained by the consideration that one is intended to make it. It is true that in order to connect referring expressions to objects of reference, the hearer must be in a position to take into account whatever information is encoded by the referring expression being used and whatever objects have been mentioned previously, either in the current utterance (in which case there may be syntactic constraints on reference) or in the prior discourse; and there is shared background information to take into account. But the *reason* this combination of linguistic and extralinguistic information is relevant to ascertaining what the speaker is referring to is that the speaker intends him to take it into account. For the speaker's referential intention is part of his communicative intention (Bach 1992), and, as Grice discovered, in recognizing this intention one relies on the fact that one is intended to recognize it (this corresponds, from the hearer's point of view, to what Grice (1989, ch. 14) called the reflexivity of the speaker's intention).

A second and related source of concern is an unexamined assumption that underlies much of the theorizing in this volume. Although there is

considerable disagreement about the exact nature of the hierarchies being correlated and about the details of the correlation, generally it is assumed that different degrees of accessibility are not merely associated with but, as a matter of linguistic convention, are encoded by different types of referring expressions. Several contributors explicitly state this assumption but do not defend it or consider any alternatives. The obvious alternative is that the different degrees of accessibility associated with different types of referring expressions are not encoded at all and that the correlation is instead a by-product of the interaction between semantic information that \*is\* encoded by these expressions and general facts about rational communication. On this, the null hypothesis, it is *because* different expressions are more or less informative that the things they can be used to refer to are less or more accessible. In other words, the givenness hierarchy is essentially (the inverse of) an informativeness hierarchy: the more “given” the referent is, the less information about it needs to be carried by any expression the speaker need use to refer to it successfully, i.e., enable the hearer to recognize which thing it is.

For example, the pronoun ‘she’ is marked as an indexical, and its particular meaning provides only the information that the referent is female. If it is to be used successfully to refer the hearer to a certain female, there must be some female that the hearer can reasonably suppose the speaker intends him to be referring to. That could be a visually present female or else one who was just mentioned (if it could be either then a more informative expression than ‘she’ would have to be used). If someone says, “I will never forget her,” intending to be referring to his beloved grandmother, he could not reasonably expect to be taken to be referring to her unless she were already salient in the context or he made her salient in some way, say by pointing to a picture of her. Using the word ‘she’ would not by itself make her salient, but using ‘my beloved grandmother’ would.

This example suggests that a speaker, in choosing an expression to use to refer the hearer to the individual he has in mind, is in effect answering the following question: given the circumstances of utterance, the history and direction of the conversation, and the mutual knowledge between me and my

audience, what is the least informative sort of expression I can use and still enable them to identify the individual I have in mind? From the standpoint of the null hypothesis, degree of accessibility is not encoded. Rather, semantic information combines with contextual information (linguistic and extralinguistic) available to the hearer, and plausibly intended by the speaker to be taken into account, to drive the hearer's inference to the referent.

A third shortcoming of this volume is that its contributors seem to conflate the distinction between reference and quantification. Otherwise, they would not put referring NPs and quantificational NPs on the same scale. Although they disagree about the details, they agree on the legitimacy of the scale itself. So, for example, indefinites are treated as if they belong on the same scale as pronouns. The problem is that whereas a pronoun like 'she' is a paradigmatic referring expression, an indefinite, like 'a woman,' is anything but. If Jack says, "A woman wants to marry me," he is not referring to any woman -- even if he has a particular woman in mind. For there is no woman that the listener must identify in order to understand the utterance (this is so even if the fact that the speaker has some unspecified woman in mind is recognized by the hearer, say because the speaker uses the specific indefinite form 'a certain woman'). To see this point, one must distinguish the content of the utterance from the fact that would make it true (if it is true). So, for example, even if Jill wants to marry Jack, he is not saying that Jill wants to marry him, although that fact about her is what makes his utterance true. A further complication here is that certain quantificational NPs, though not inherently referential, *can* be used to refer. For example, definite descriptions can be used referentially as well as attributively (note that 'definite' does not mean 'referential'). However, this does not put such NPs in the same semantic category as pronouns (see, e.g., Bach 1987 and Neale 1990). Unfortunately, the contributors to this volume do not heed the distinction between quantificational NPs, including those that can be *used* referentially, from inherently referential NPs. This oversight undercuts much of their discussion.

Despite my reservations concerning the three foundational issues discussed above, I can recommend this volume for its wealth of detailed examples and subtle observations. Anyone who reads it will appreciate the variety and

complexity of the ways and means by which we call things to one another's attention.

## References

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