

Part 4

Pragmatics

Part 4 deals with topics which are normally held to fall under the heading of pragmatics. The topics of reference and deixis, and conversational implicatures, dealt with in Chapters 15 and 17, respectively, belong uncontroversially here, since they deal not only with aspects of meaning not overtly encoded as the conventional meaning of any linguistic expressions, but also with how language 'hooks on to' the extralinguistic world. Speech acts, on the other hand, the topic of Chapter 16, straddle the semantics/pragmatics divide somewhat uncomfortably: performative verbs arguably belong to lexical semantics, and grammatical performatives, like interrogatives and imperatives, would not be out of place in Chapter 14. However, much illocutionary force is implicated, and to that extent belongs in pragmatics. It is customary to treat the various aspects of speech act theory as belonging to pragmatics, and this convention has been followed here.

CHAPTER 15

Reference and deixis

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CHAPTER 15

Reference and deixis

15.1 Reference

The topic of reference has been the cause of an outflow of gallons of recondite ink: some of the subtlest philosophical minds have grappled with it, and the debates have been contentious and inconclusive. What is put forward in this chapter is necessarily of an introductory nature.

Under the heading of reference we encounter one of the most fundamental and vital aspects of language and language use, namely, the relations between language, as a medium of communication between human beings, and the world, about which we communicate. One of the most basic things that we do when we communicate through language is to pick out entities in the world and ascribe properties to them, or indicate relations between them. Reference is concerned with designating entities in the world by linguistic means.

Right at the start we encounter deep controversies. One of these concerns the basic nature of reference. Let us take it for the moment as uncontroversial (it isn't) that one of the terms in an instance of the relation of reference is something in the world. What is the other term? The obvious choices are a linguistic expression, such as *Tom*, or *the man*, and the person speaking. It is commonplace in discussions of linguistic matters to say things like: '*Bill Clinton* (in, say, *Bill Clinton is to visit Ireland in May*) refers to the current president of the United States.' Here we are putting forward an expression and a person as the terms of the relation of reference. However, there is no privileged one-to-one relationship between the expression *Bill Clinton* and the Bill Clinton who is president of the USA. There are doubtless hundreds (at least) of Bill Clintons in the world. *Bill Clinton* referred to the current president of the USA only because some speaker intended to use the expression for that purpose on some particular occasion. Here we have a unique one-to-one relation, namely, that between the speaker's intention to refer and the president of the USA. We shall therefore adopt Searle's (1969) position, and say that reference is not an inherent property of expressions, but is a speech act. This is not to say, of course, that the speech act of reference is unconstrained by the linguistic

expressions used; on the contrary, certain expressions are specially adapted for this function, as we shall see.

Two further uses of the word *reference* should be signalled, one of which will be occasionally adopted here, the other not. It is common to speak of the reference of a linguistic expression, meaning the things it has been used on some specific occasion to refer to. So, for instance, in a newspaper headline: *Bill Clinton to visit Ireland in May*, the reference (in this sense) of *Bill Clinton* is the present president of the USA. This seems to be harmless, and does not lead to confusion. (If there is any danger of confusion we shall use *referent(s)*.) Another common usage is to say that, for instance, *dog* refers to the class of dogs, and that the reference of *dog* is the class of dogs. This is contrary to our usage, and it will not be adopted. We shall follow Lyons (1968), and say that *dog* **denotes** the class of dogs, and that the class of dogs constitutes the **denotation** of *dog*. (There is, of course, a relation between what an expression denotes and what acts of reference it can be used in the performance of: the former constrains the latter.)

We have so far assumed that the distal term of the relation of reference is something in the world. But this, too, is rife with controversy, and goes even deeper than the controversy just mentioned. Are there, indeed, any such things as 'things in the world'? Are things not mental constructs? In which case we should specify that reference is to do with things in the experienced world, not in the objective world. Of course, we assume there is some connection between these two worlds, but the relation between referrers and the objective world is indirect. This position is compellingly argued by Jackendoff (1983), and will be assumed here to be correct, although we shall continue to speak merely of *things in the world*.

15.1.1 Definite reference

There are various types and modes of reference. We shall concentrate on three: **definite reference**, **indefinite reference**, and **generic reference**. There is no doubt that it is definite reference which is the most crucial for the functioning of language. (In the philosophical literature it is usually called *singular definite reference*, for our purposes, however, there are no particular problems in moving from *singular* to *plural*.)

To open the discussion of definite reference, consider the two sentences below:

- (1) The man gave it to her.
- (2) A man gave it to her.

How does the meaning of sentence (1) differ from the meaning of sentence (2)? Obviously both indicate an act of giving by some adult male person (we shall ignore the rest of the sentence). The features which distinguish (1) from (2) can be set out as follows:

- (a) The intended referential target is necessarily a particular entity (believed by the speaker to fall into the category MAN, but notice that the speaker can be mistaken about this and still, on some particular occasion, successfully refer), who can in principle be uniquely identified by the speaker.

This means that the speaker should be able, on demand, to give information that for them distinguishes the (man) in question from all other men. The speaker may not be able to name the man, or even give any descriptive information: for instance, what makes the man unique may be only that he occasioned an auditory experience on the part of the speaker at a particular time and place.

- (b) The speaker intends that the referential target should come to be uniquely identified for the hearer, too.

This is, in fact, the main point of the act of reference. Once again, the information which enables the hearer to uniquely identify the intended referent may be minimal.

- (c) The act of reference brings with it to the hearer an implicit assurance that they have enough information to uniquely identify the referent, taking into account the semantic content of the referring expression (or other properties of the expression which limit the search space), and information available from context, whether situational (i.e. currently perceivable), linguistic, or mental (i.e. memory and knowledge).

Searle makes a quaint distinction between a ‘successful* act of reference, which requires only (a) to hold, and a ‘fully consummated’ act of reference, which requires also (b). (The act of reference is thus like having an orgasm: one can do it on one’s own, but to be fully consummated we need a partner.) We can follow Searle, and add the following features/conditions for a fully successful act of referring (not necessarily distinctive for referring):

- (d) Normal input and output conditions hold.

This just means that, for instance, speaker and hearer speak the same language, the utterance is both audible and comprehensible to the hearer, and so on.

- (e) The act of reference is embedded in a more inclusive speech act.

An act of reference cannot stand on its own as a communication: *the man* communicates nothing, except when embedded in a sentence like *I saw’ the man*, or as an answer to a question such as *What can you see?*

- (f) The speaker intends that the hearer should recognize his intention to refer by virtue of his having produced the utterance in question.

- (g) Prototypically, the part of the utterance, the production of which is intended to signal the intention to refer, should have a form which conventionally performs this function.

In general, the identification of the referents of definite referring expressions is necessary so that the hearer can reconstruct the proposition(s) being expressed by the speaker, as these specify the arguments of such propositions. (We shall not discuss here the knotty problem of exactly what the terms of a proposition are, i.e. whether they are things in the objective world or the experienced world, or entities in the same sort of platonic realm as numbers, etc.)

15.1.2 Indefinite reference

Sentence (2) above is an example of indefinite reference. The essence of indefinite reference is that the identity of the referent is not germane to the message: that is, nothing hinges on the individual features of the referent, only the class features indicated are presented as relevant. Notice that this has nothing to do with whether or not either speaker or hearer is in fact able to effect a unique identification of the referent. Suppose someone complains of extreme boredom, and in response I pick up a book and offer it to them, saying either (i) *Here, read a book*, or (ii) *Here, read this book*. What is the difference? In both cases the identity of the book is clear to both participants. The difference is that in (i), the identity of the book is not germane, just the fact that it is a book, whereas in (ii), the identity of the book is presented as (a) important to the message (e.g. *You're bound to find this particular one interesting*), and (b) accessible to the hearer. (We shall leave aside for the moment the question of why it would not be appropriate to say *Here, read the book* in these circumstances.)

We have so far only considered the indefinite article as a signal of indefiniteness. However, all the following sentences contain indefinite expressions:

Come up and see me sometime.
 I expect he's hiding somewhere.
 You'll manage somehow.
 Are you looking for something/somebody?
 She met this sailor.
 Some man gave it to him.
 To make the spell work, you have to say certain words.

Consider now the following sentence:

- (3) To get the automatic door to open you have to say a word.

This can be interpreted in two ways: either it is the case that any word will open the door, or a specific one is necessary. This is the classic **specific/non-specific** distinction in indefinites, which has given rise to much discussion. It is usually claimed that the distinction is operative only in certain modal contexts,

for example with *want*, *must*, *have to*, and so on (the standard example is *Mary wants to marry a Norwegian banker*). It is true that there are circumstances where the difference is hard to intuit (e.g. *Mary married a banker*), but this may simply be because it is difficult to construct a context where the distinction would be relevant. It would be difficult to extend the idea of ‘modality’ to cover the following cases, where the distinction can easily be felt:

(4) A: How did he get the door to open?

B: He said a word.

(5) A: Why was Mary angry?

B: Because John bought a book.

The specific readings of *a word* in (4) and *a book* in (5) are very close to “a certain word” and “a certain book”, respectively. This reading shares with the meaning of a corresponding definite expression (*the word* and *the book*) that the identity of the referent is relevant to the situation described; what distinguishes these readings from definites is that the speaker does not signal to the hearer that the identification of the referent is essential to the message being conveyed (I am referring here to what I assume are central uses of *a certain X*; there are (presumably) marginal cases where the use represents the deliberate avoidance of a proper name for (presumably) non-semantic reasons, that is, the proper name, would, other things being equal, have been appropriate):

(6) I spoke to a certain person about you-know-what.

Notice that *this* can also function as a specific indefinite:

(7) We met this man in the pub.

This usage seems to signal that the man in question has been introduced as a topic about which more will be said; *a certain man* does not function in this way.

There has been some controversy about whether sentences like (4) are genuinely ambiguous between the two readings, or whether the specific reading is merely a contextual enrichment of the non-specific reading. This is somewhat difficult to decide. One can point to the fact that in some languages, the distinction is made grammatically:

(8) Marie cherche un homme qui **peut** lui faire l’amour douze fois par jour.

(9) Marie cherche un homme qui **puisse** lui faire l’amour douze fois par jour.

(“Marie is looking for a man who can make love to her twelve times a day”)

In (8), Marie knows exactly who(m) she is looking for; in (9) she is simply overly optimistic. The difference is signalled by indicative vs. subjunctive mood in the verb.

In Turkish, a difference of this kind can be signalled by the presence or absence of the direct object marker on the noun:

- (io) Bir **kelime** soyleti. (“S/he said a word”; non-specific)
 (n) Bir **kelimeyi** soyleti. (“S/he said a word”; specific)

But such observations are not conclusive as far as ambiguity is concerned. If we take it that the specific indefinite is more specific than the non-specific indefinite in the same, or a similar sense in which *dog* is more specific than *animal*, then we can apply the independent truth-condition test. Recall examples like the following:

- (12) A: Does John drink?
 B: No, he’ll just have an orange juice.

This shows that the specific reading of *drink* (= “drink alcohol”) has independence.

The specific reading of *child* (= “girl”), on the other hand, does not pass this test:

- (13) A: Was it a child who answered the door?
 B: *No, it was a boy.

We can now apply the same test to indefinites. First notice the normality of the following:

- (14) A: Do you have to say a certain word?
 B: No, any word will do.

If *a word* is ambiguous, with *a certain word* as one of its readings, the following ought to be normal:

- (15) A: Do you have to say a word?
 B: No, any word will do.

Clearly, this is not normal, and this is evidence for the lack of distinctness of the specific reading.

At least one analysis of indefinites (Hawkins 1978) claims that the use of an indefinite implies that reference is being made to one item out of a set of similar items. Suppose A says, *I can’t see to read in my bedroom* and B replies, *Take a lamp from the dining-room*. This seems to implicate that there is more than one lamp in the dining-room, otherwise B would have said, *Take the lamp from the dining-room*. However, this is not quite true: the facts are more complex. Suppose B does not know how many lamps there are in the dining-room. In that case, B will still say, *Take a lamp*. . . . That is to say, the true implicature of *a lamp*, out of context, is that a plurality of (qualifying) lamps is not excluded. A will take an implicature that there is more than one lamp only if they know (or assume) that B knows how many lamps there are. The claim Hawkins should have made, therefore, is that the use of an indefinite implicates that reference is not knowingly being made to an item uniquely defined by the linguistic expression used. If the referent is known by the speaker to be

thus uniquely defined, but the particular identity is not specially relevant, then some other construction must be used, for instance, *There's a lamp in the dining-room you could use.*

15.1.3 Generic reference

Now consider the following sentences:

- (16) The tiger is a friendly beast.
- (17) A tiger is a friendly beast.
- (18) Tigers are friendly beasts.

Sentence (16) is ambiguous, with a reading which is irrelevant to our current concerns, but all three have readings which involve what is called **generic reference**, that is, reference to a class of referents. All of the above predicate friendliness as a general characteristic of the members of the class of tigers. None of them is inconsistent with minor exceptions, but all of them are inconsistent with the existence of a significant subclass of unfriendly tigers:

- (19) The tiger, with few exceptions, is a friendly beast.
- (20) ?The tiger is a friendly beast, although there are many that are not friendly.
- (21) A tiger is a friendly beast, although there is the occasional exception.
- (22) ?A tiger is a friendly beast, although many of them aren't.
- (23) Tigers, with few exceptions, are friendly beasts.
- (24) TTigers are friendly beasts, although many of them aren't.

None of the above is synonymous with *All tigers are friendly beasts* or *Every tiger is a friendly beast*'.

- (25) *All tigers are friendly beasts, although there are a few exceptions.

There are two sorts of proposition involving generic reference as argument: either something is predicated of the whole class referred to, or something is predicated of each member of the class. These two readings available under the heading of generic reference are known as the **collective reading** and the **distributed reading**, respectively. Sentences (16), (17), and (18) have different affinities for these two uses. Sentence (16) strongly prefers the collective reading:

- (26) The tiger is extinct.
- (27) The tiger is a widely distributed species.

It will accept distributive use under certain conditions (which are at present not clear):

- (28) ??I like watching the tiger.

Sentence (17) will accept only distributive uses:

- (29) * A tiger is extinct.
- (30) * A tiger is widely distributed.
- (31) A tiger has a long tail.
- (32) I like watching a tiger.

(Notice that this last sentence is singular, that is to say, it expresses enjoyment of watching a single tiger. This is why it will not accept distributive plural uses (i.e. those where the basic fact involves individuals, not the species, but a plurality of individuals is necessary):

- (33) The computer has revolutionized business practices.
- (34) Computers have revolutionized business practices.
- (35) *A computer has revolutionized business practices.)

Sentences of the form of (18) will accept either use:

- (36) Tigers are extinct.
- (37) Tigers are widely distributed.
- (38) I like watching tigers.

(Notice that the last sentence is not plural, that is to say, the plurality does not fall under the scope of *like watching*—one can with perfect propriety reply: *Good, here's one for you.*)

15.1.4 Non-referential uses of referring expressions

It is as well to note that although the expression *a tiger* in many of its uses can be used in the act of indefinite reference, it is not always so used, as for instance in (39):

- (39) This animal is a tiger.

Most analysts agree that this sentence does not state that there is a tiger that this animal is identical with. For instance, it does not make sense to ask *Which tiger is it?* It seems clear that *a tiger* here stands for a set of properties which are being predicated of *this animal*. This enables us to give a satisfying account of (one) reading of *John is a complete politician*, namely, that John has all the properties which are characteristic of (prototypical) politicians.

15.2 Definite reference

We shall henceforward concentrate on definite reference, which is arguably the prototypical type of reference.

15.2.1 Types of definite referring expression

The following types of expression are definite referring expressions in English:

- (i) noun phrase with definite determiners: the book, this book, that book, my book, your book, his book, her book, our book, their book;
- (ii) personal pronouns: I, you, he, she, it, us, they;
- (iii) proper names: John, Mary, Paris, *Gone with the Wind*, *Middlemarch*, Notre Dame, Parsifal, Guernica;
- (iv) certain locative adverbs: here, there, yonder;
- (v) certain temporal adverbs: now, then, yesterday, next Xmas, (certain verb tenses).

Definiteness can also be argued to be present in some unexpected places. Consider the difference between the following two sentences:

(40) Mary's watching.

(41) Mary's reading.

There are several features which these two sentences have in common. Neither verb makes sense without there being something which plays the role of direct object, or patient of the action: one can't read or watch, without reading or watching *something*. Furthermore, in neither case is the patient of the action explicitly mentioned. However, there is a crucial difference between them, and that is, that the hearer is required to recover (from the context) a specific direct object for *watch*, but not for *read*. We shall borrow Matthews's term and say that there is a latent direct object in (40). The evidence for this is as follows.

- (i) 'Reading' counts as an autonomous activity. 'Watching' does not. Imagine someone (A) standing outside the closed door of a room, speaking to (B) who is inside the room:

(42) A: What are you doing?

B: I'm reading

B: ?I'm watching.

The reason B's second answer is odd is that A is not in a position to recover the 'missing' direct object.

- (ii) *Watch* gives rise to an identity constraint in verb-phrase anaphora, whereas *read* does not:

(43) John is reading; so is Bill.

(44) Mary is watching; so is Sue.

For (44) to be normal, Mary and Sue have to be watching the same thing (which could, of course, be the same television programme on two widely separated television sets); there is no need for John and Bill in (43) to be reading the same thing.

The use of a relative adjective like *tall* can be argued to involve covert reference to a reference value for underlying variable property. Thus, *Mary is tall* means something like "Mary's height is greater than X to a noteworthy extent", where X is the reference value for height.

The use of an ambiguous word such as *bank* likewise involves a kind of definiteness: in, for example, *We finally reached the bank*, the speaker intends one specific sense out of the possibilities to be operative, and intends that the hearer be able to identify the same sense, its identity being crucial to the message.

Except in the case of zero referring expressions, it is not possible to convey pure definiteness, and even in such cases, the search space for the intended referent is heavily constrained by selectional restrictions and so on; that is to say, it is virtually always the case that some sort of extra help is given to the hearer in selecting the intended referent(s), and this is typically overtly encoded. So, for instance, *the book* indicates that the intended referent falls within the denotation of *book* (i.e. is an instance of the concept BOOK), *he* indicates that the referent is singular, human, male, and neither speaker nor hearer in the current speech situation, *John* constrains the search to those who bear that name, and so on. The types of ‘help’ that speakers give to hearers can be roughly grouped under three headings: describing (e.g. “human, male”, “book”, etc.), pointing (e.g. *that book* is relatively distant from speaker), and naming. These are not, of course, mutually exclusive; a given expression may incorporate more than one of these. We shall now examine separately and in greater detail, three central types of definite expression: noun phrases with the definite article, proper names, and deictic expressions.

15.2.2 Definite descriptions (noun phrases with definite article)

It has been sometimes claimed that the way definite descriptions work is to provide sufficient information to distinguish the referent from all other possible referents, that is, to render it unique (presumably in the universe). This is not of course ruled out: if someone refers to *the boil on my nose*, and there is clearly only one boil on the speaker’s nose, then that illustrious object has been distinguished from all other objects in the universe. But this cannot be a general truth about definite descriptions. Consider the following three instances:

(45) A: Have you seen *Pride and Prejudice*!

B: No, but I’ve read *the book*.

The emphasized noun phrase refers successfully, but the only descriptive information offered is that the referent belongs to the class of books, and there are millions of these in existence.

(46) A: (in restaurant) I didn’t want custard on my pie.

B: You should have told *the waitress*.

(47) A: (at breakfast in hotel on holiday in Durham) What shall we do today?

B: I think we should go and see *the cathedral*.

In none of these cases is enough information given overtly within the definite

noun phrase to uniquely distinguish the intended referent, yet they all refer successfully. How is this possible? Of course, in each of the above cases, the hearer ends up in possession of enough information to characterize the referent uniquely. The question is really, what principles govern the amount of information the speaker has to provide explicitly? Sometimes, this may be quite a lot:

- (48) Could you send me the small blue book near the right-hand end of the second shelf from the bottom of the bookshelves in my bedroom?

In (45), (46), and (47), the amount of information is quite limited (even so, it is perhaps more than strictly necessary in some cases: e.g. in (45), *I've read it* would probably do), but at least in some cases it is necessary. So, for instance, *the building* would probably not suffice for (47). What we shall say, is that the job of the speaker is to give enough information to uniquely specify the referent within some limited domain. Then, provided that the hearer can identify the relevant domain, the information given will suffice. So, for instance, in (45), the hearer merely needs to identify a book pertaining to something that has just been mentioned; in (46), there are thousands of waitresses in the world, but only one relevant to the current immediate situation that A and B find themselves in; a similar explanation is valid for (47), except that the situation is a broader and less immediate one. This is all very well, but merely pushes the problem back one stage: how does the hearer identify the relevant domain within which the description offered uniquely characterizes the referent? The process goes something like this. The hearer makes an ordered search through possible domains, roughly in the order: (i) immediately preceding discourse (more strictly, within short-term memory), (ii) immediate situation (currently available to senses), (iii) broader situation, (iv) memory/general knowledge. We need to assume that these are in decreasing order of accessibility (in terms of amount of cognitive work needed to activate them). So, if a qualifying referent is found in the first domain, then that is taken as the intended referent (if there is more than one qualifying referent in the first domain, the speaker has failed to refer successfully). If there is no qualifying referent in the first domain, the hearer then searches the next most accessible domain, and so on, until he finds a suitable potential referent. This account (adapted from Cruse (1980)) is broadly compatible with a relevance theoretical (RT) account (see Chapter 17).

15.2.3 Proper names

Proper names, too, have given rise to a great deal of discussion, especially within the philosophy of language. There are two diametrically opposed extreme positions with regard to proper names. One of these says that proper names have no meaning whatsoever: this is usually expressed by saying that they have extension, but no intension. That is to say, they are unlike, for

instance, *the dog*, which can be used to refer to canines in the extralinguistic world by virtue of the intension, that is, the semantic content, of *dog*. Whereas a proper name like John can be used to refer to an individual referent, it does not do so by virtue of its semantic content, but by virtue of some other property, namely, that it is borne by the referent as a name. Imagine we have a batch of identical boxes which we may want to designate individually at some time. The most convenient way would be to stick a numbered label on each of them: we could then talk about *Box 235* and so on. It is clear that the numbers do not constitute in any way descriptions of the boxes, and have no *essential* connection with their respective boxes. On the view of proper names currently under examination, proper names are no more meaningful than the numbers on the boxes. They function to individuate members of large sets of similar entities, to distinguish which by means of descriptions would be either cumbersome, if sufficient details were known, or impossible, if they are not known. Hence, we find proper names used particularly for people and places.

The opposite view of proper names from the above is that proper names function as abbreviated descriptions, that is, they stand for the sum of the properties that distinguish the bearer from all other referents, or, to put it another way, they get their meaning by association, not with generic concepts, in the way that common nouns like *dog* do, but with individual concepts. Thus, just as we say *It's a dog* entails *It's an animal*, and this is ultimately a consequence of the properties of the concepts DOG and ANIMAL, in reference to the present writer, we would also say *It's Alan* entails *It's a man*, because of the relation between the individual concept ALAN CRUSE and the generic concept MAN. It might be objected here that there are many individuals who bear the name *Alan*, and hence the entailment does not hold. However, there is more than one concept DOG (viz. the part of an old-fashioned fireplace where vessels are placed), and hence, by this argument, the former entailment does not hold, either. But there is no reason why ambiguity should invalidate entailment, as long as a determinate sense is intended on the occasion of use. On this view, the only difference between the *dog* case and the *Alan* case is the greater degree of homonymy in the latter. (Notice that in a use such as *There were three Alans in the room*, the word *Alan* is not being used as a proper noun, that is to say, there is no activation of associated individual concepts; *Alan* functions in such cases as a common noun meaning "person bearing the name *Alan*"⁹⁹.)

Here we have two apparently irreconcilable views. In fact, it will be argued here that both are (partially) correct. Let us first look at objections to each of the views. A standard argument against the second view, that proper names are abbreviated descriptions, is that the continuing use of proper names for reference is immune to changing conceptions of the nature of the referent: proper names have stable referential properties. We may, for instance, discover that someone we have come to think of as a gypsy princess called Toni turns out to be a Welshman: we can on such a discovery say, without a hint of contradiction, *My friend Toni isn't a gypsy princess, but a Welsh ex-miner*

(notice we don't say *He's not Toni after all* nor *Toni doesn't exist any more* nor even *Toni has changed*). How is this possible, if proper names stand for an individual concept? We shall return to this in a moment.

There are also arguments against the proposal that proper names are devoid of meaning. One is that there must be an associated set of properties of some kind, which are in some way defining, or at least distinctive, otherwise one would never be able to say *No, that's not John, that's Bill*. (Notice, that even after the traumatic discovery of the previous paragraph, one would still not be in a position to say *That's not Toni*: it is, on the other hand, inconceivable that the name would persist if EVERY property changed.) Another argument, or at least pertinent observation, is that many common nouns have a similar property of denotational stability in the face of modifications in the concept. These are the so-called **natural-kind** terms, like *water, gold, tiger*, and so forth. We shall at some time have to integrate these into our picture. A different line of argument is to point out that, for instance, it would be odd to christen a girl *John*, or *The Old Mill*, or even *Littlehampton*, nor would we expect a boy to be called *Daffodil*, or a country to be called *Mary*. We also say things like: *He doesn't look at all like a Cecil*. Why do we do this if (a) names have no semantic properties and (b) we expect to be understood?

We seem to be faced with a welter of apparently contradictory facts. Yet a satisfying account of proper-name-hood should accommodate them all without strain. Let us consider in more detail how proper names work, and enquire why all languages seem to have them, and what distinctive function they serve. The question can first be considered in the light of the three ways a speaker aids a hearer in selecting the appropriate referent. It will be remembered that three main ways were postulated: describing, naming, and pointing. How does naming help the hearer? The case of naming is not fundamentally different from the case of describing: a speaker gives enough descriptive information to render the referent unique in some relevant domain. Something similar is true of the use of proper names: the speaker uses a proper name when only one referent within the most relevant domain bears it; in other words, the name renders the referent unique within the domain. In a definite description, it is the descriptive information that performs the act of selection. Searle (1969) makes a point of declaring that "bears the name *John*" is not an adequate paraphrase of the meaning of *John*. And in many important ways this is true. However, it is by means of this aspect of its meaning that a proper name refers to or selects its referent. It is clear that in most circumstances, referring by means of a proper name is much more economical than referring by means of description. In most everyday domains, there is only one John: another way of referring, however, would be necessary at a congress of Johns. It is probably an advantage, too, that proper names are, as it were, reusable. Speakers normally have a limited inventory of possible proper names (at least for people). It would be uneconomical to have a different name for everyone one knows.

Searle also stresses the importance of the fact that a proper name must be

associated with a set of properties—with an individual concept of some sort, in our terms. Otherwise it would not be possible to use a proper name consistently, that is, by referring to the same individual on each occasion of use: we must have some way of recognizing that individual. The importance of the associated individual concept, however, goes even beyond that: in the act of expressing a proposition using a proper name in argument position, it is the individual concept that forms the true argument of which something is predicated. Notice, too, that a sentence like *Even John thinks that the story must be true* relies on the association of certain properties with *John*. It is also true, however, that we must not lose sight of the fact that changing an individual concept does not entail a change of name: the concepts associated with proper names are, in a sense, always ‘interim’, and liable to modification at any time. Again, this is unlike descriptions. Searle puts this forward as another functional virtue that proper names possess: their flexibility. It is useful to have ways of referring that are not tied to particular constant conceptual properties. It enables us to refer successfully to entities about which we know very little. A similar functional virtue attaches to natural-kind terms. It might be proposed that these are particularly adapted to entities whose essences are mysterious. (It is a moot point whether, for instance, *STALLION* and *HORSE* are different sorts of concept, or whether they are basically the same sort of concept, but they are attached to the words *stallion* and *horse* in different ways.)

In conclusion, we need to think a little more about the conceptual preferences of certain proper names. Are these of the same order as the reluctance to attribute the ability to sing to a dog, or to apply the term *aunt* to a girl of three, or *bachelor* to a priest? (They clearly do not involve logically necessary properties.) None of these seems to be an appropriate model, because each of them can be accounted for by reference to the concept denoted by the word. The properties of proper names we are referring to persist across all the homonymous manifestations of the terms, and thus cannot be explained by reference to the associated (individual) concepts. Are there any other models that might be more apposite? Possibly. In Chapter 7, section 7.1.2, it was claimed that the difference between, for instance, *horse* and *nag* was not to be attributed to the fact that different concepts were denoted by the two words, but to semantic properties attaching to the words themselves. If such properties are possible for common nouns, why should they not also be possible for proper names? Such a proposal would further undermine the notion that proper names are meaningless, but would not seriously impinge on the more central aspects of proper name use and theorizing. Of course, the same problem would arise here as with common nouns and word-specific properties, namely, the nature of the connection between word and property, bearing in mind that word-specific properties are in the last analysis also conceptual, or at least mediated by the conceptual system.

15.3 Deixis

Deixis means different things to different people. For Bühler (1934), any expression which located a referent in space or time was a deictic expression. Thus, for him, *The cat sat on the mat* contained a deictic locative expression, namely, *on the mat* (the sentence also contains a tense marker, which is usually considered to be deictic). Later scholars have mostly restricted the term deixis to cases where the referent is located using the current speech event or one or more of its participants as reference points. In the sentence *The cat sat on the mat*, the cat is located with respect to the mat: the mat is thus the reference point, and the speech event plays no role. In the sentence *That cat sat on the mat*, however, the cat is located not only with respect to the mat, but also with respect to the speaker, *that* indicating (probably) that the cat was relatively distant from the speaker. A point of disagreement concerns the deictic status of the definite article. Some scholars consider it to be deictic, because the current context of situation is involved in referent identification. Others exclude the definite article, because it does not locate the referent on any specific parameter. We shall, at least at first, include only expressions which truly locate a referent with respect to (some aspect of) the current speech situation. We therefore include personal pronouns, but exclude the definite article. Our key diagnostic criterion for deictic expressions will be the sensitivity of their use in designating a given referent to certain speech-situational parameters, particularly location in space and time relative to the speaker, and participatory status. Thus, someone referring to a book held by another person would say *that book*, but the holder of the book, referring to the same book, would say *this book*, referring to 8 July on 7 July, one would say *tomorrow*, but referring to the same day on 9 July, one would say *yesterday*, a speaker refers to himself as *I*, but his hearer, referring to the same person, would say *you*. We shall initially recognize five main types of deixis: **person deixis, spatial deixis, temporal deixis, social deixis, and discourse deixis.**

15.3.1 Person deixis

Person deixis involves basically the speaker, known as the **first person**, the addressee, known as the **second person**, and other significant participants in the speech situation, neither speaker nor hearer; these are known as **third person**. All of these, at least in English, come in singular and plural form and several are marked for case. (See table p. 320.)

In many languages, pronoun usage encodes social deixis (see below). Notice that the third person singular forms also encode gender. It is important to realize that the occurrence of gender in these forms is not deictic, that is to say, it is not sensitive to aspects of the speech situation. In other words, not all the meaning of a **deictic expression** is deictic in nature.

	Singular	Plural
1st person	I/me	we/us
2nd person	you	you
3rd person	he/him, she/her, it	they/them

A couple of remarks are worth making on the subject of plural forms of personal pronouns. First of all, there is a kind of dominance relation holding among the terms: first person dominates second and third, and second person dominates third. This manifests itself in the following way. If the group designated includes the first person, then a first person plural pronoun must be used, even if there is only one first person and thousands of second and/or third persons. Similarly, if there is no first person in the group designated, but at least one second person, then a second person pronoun is needed. Only if neither first person nor second person is present can third person pronouns be used.

The second point concerns the **representative** vs. **true** use of the plural pronouns. The word *we* is rarely spoken by a plurality of persons: there is normally a single speaker. This speaker represents the group to which he or she refers. On the other hand, *they* usually designates a plurality of present referents. Representative use is possible, but is more uncommon (e.g. in pointing to a single person and saying *They are going to Greece for their holidays*). In the second person, the two possibilities, of representative and true use, are more or less equally likely.

15.3.2 Spatial deixis

Spatial deixis manifests itself principally in the form of locative adverbs such as *here* and *there*, and demonstratives/determiners such as *this* and *that*. English has a relatively impoverished spatial deictic system, with only two terms, usually labelled **proximal** and **distal**. Many languages have three or more terms. The most common types of three-term system subdivide the distal category. There are two main ways of doing this. The first involves a **distal/remote** distinction. (English at one time had such a system, with three terms *here*, *there*, and *yonder*.) Spanish has such a system. The other type of three-term system does not strictly depend on distance, but is closely related to the person system, that is to say, the terms can be glossed “near to me” (= *here*), “near to you”, and “not near to either you or me” (= third person). Older analyses of Turkish proposed this analysis. It is nowadays not considered correct, however. One suggestion as to the true nature of the Turkish spatial deictics is that within the distal category there is a **gestural/symbolic** distinction (see below). Deictic systems with more than three terms incorporate such notions as ‘visible’/‘invisible’, ‘below the line of sight’/‘above the line of sight’, and so on.

Let us return now to English (although many of the observations will be more generally valid). The proximal term *here* means something like “region relatively close to the speaker”, and *there* means “relatively distant from the speaker”. It is important to realize, however, that ‘relative closeness’ is contextually determined. *Here* may represent an area less than the square metre on which the speaker is standing, or it could be something much vaster, such as *Here in our local galaxy cluster*. This is another species of definiteness: *here* is meaningless unless the hearer can locate the dividing line (in terms of distance) between *here* and *there*. (Paradoxically, there is no limit to how far away *here* can extend.)

The spatial deictics show a similar sort of dominance relation to the personal pronouns. We can illustrate this with *this* and *that*. The point is that the combination of *this book* and *that book* must be collectively referred to as *these books*, not *those books*. This encourages us to think of *this* as a **first person deictic**. (There is a small amount of evidence that *that* is ambiguous between second person and third person, in that *those* prefers to be either one or the other. I can refer to (i) *those books that you have* and (ii) *those books that John has*. If I subsequently say *Those books are very valuable*, there is a strong preference for interpreting this as either (i) or (ii), but not both together, unless you and John can be united in a joint second-person reference.)

15*3*3 Temporal deixis

Temporal deictics function to locate points or intervals on the time axis, using (ultimately) the moment of utterance as a reference point. There are thus three major divisions of the time axis: (i) before the moment of utterance, (ii) at the time of utterance, (iii) after the time of utterance. The most basic temporal deictics in English are *now* and *then*. *Now* is in some ways a kind of temporal *here*, and displays the same capacity for indefinite extension. That is, it can refer to a precise instant: *Press the button—NOW!*; or it can accommodate a wide swathe of time: *The solar system is now in a relatively stable phase* (notice, however, that the phenomenon of dominance is absent from temporal deictics, as is the association with first person). *Then* points away from the present, but is indifferent as to direction, which is normally indicated contextually (*We were happy then!*, *OK, TU see you then*).

Temporal deictics depend heavily on calendric notions, if we understand that term to subsume both clock and calendar. For instance, *today*, *yesterday*, and *tomorrow*, designate, respectively, “the period of 24 hours beginning at 12 o’clock midnight which includes the time of utterance”, “the period of 24 hours which precedes the one including the time of utterance” and “the period of 24 hours which follows the one including the time of utterance”. Notice that these terms’ meanings include both deictic information (past, present, or future) and non-deictic information (“period of 24 hours beginning.”, etc.). Only the 24-hour period has lexicalized deictics. For parallel references to

other periods, we must use the terms *this*, *last*, and *next*. With these, there are complications (and uncertainties) according to whether the time period is referred to by means of a proper name or not. Consider, first, cases where a proper name is not used. Expressions such as *this week*, *last week*, and *next week*, *this month*, *last month*, and *next month*, *this year*, *last year*, and *next year* are all interpreted calendrically, that is to say, to take the example of *week*, *last week* means “the period of seven days beginning on Sunday (or Monday) preceding the corresponding period which includes the time of utterance” (a non-calendric interpretation would be “the period of seven days preceding the time of utterance”). Notice that *Mary is here for a week/month/year* is not normally interpreted calendrically; *Mary is here for the next week/month/year*, according to my intuitions, can be either calendric or not.

If the proper name of a period of time is used, additional restrictions come into play. Take the names of days, first. The lexical items *today*, *yesterday*, and *tomorrow* have priority, so that, for instance *this Wednesday* cannot be uttered on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday. *Last Wednesday* cannot be uttered on Thursday to refer to the previous day, but may be used to refer to the Wednesday of the preceding week. Speakers disagree as to whether a reference to, say, Monday, said on the Wednesday of the same week, should be *this Monday* or *last Monday*; a parallel disagreement applies to a reference, said on the same day, to the following Saturday—some would say *this Saturday*, others *next Saturday*. In referring to months, *this July* means “the July falling within the calendric year which includes the time of utterance”, with the exception that one does not normally say (with exceptions to be noted in a moment) tA/s *July* if one is speaking in July. With months, there is a similar uncertainty concerning the meanings of *last* and *next* as with named days.

It is of course possible, and quite normal, to say, for instance, *This July is the hottest I have ever known*, when one is still within the period designated by *this July*. However, it is important to realize that the rA^w in this usage is not a temporal *this*, that is to say, it does not belong to the contrast set which includes *last* and *next*. In fact, it is an extended use of the spatial *this*, and contrasts with TAaZ *July was the hottest I have ever known*. It is therefore not a specifically temporal deictic.

It has already been mentioned that verb tense represents a type of deixis. This will not be dealt with here; it is discussed in Chapter 14.

15.3.4 Social deixis

Social deixis is exemplified by certain uses of the so-called TV (*tulvous*) pronouns in many languages. It will be illustrated here using examples from French. Arguments will be presented that not all the usages of TV pronouns fall properly under the heading of deixis. One which incontrovertibly does is where relative social status of speaker and hearer is signalled. There are three basic possibilities involving two communicants A and B: (i) A addresses B

with *tu*, B addresses A with *vous*; (ii) A addresses B with *vous*, B addresses A with *tu*; (iii) A and B both use the same form (either *tu* or *vous*). The basic parameter here is social status: *tu* points downwards along the scale of social status with the speaker's position as reference point, *vous* points upwards, while symmetrical use signals social equality.

Turning now to instances of symmetrical usage of TV pronouns, let us enquire briefly into the factors which determine whether *tu* or *vous* is used, and whether such usage can properly be regarded as deixis. One factor is usually described by some such term as 'social distance': *tu* indicates intimacy, *vous* indicates lack of intimacy, or distance. It is tempting to draw a parallel here with the proximal and distal terms in spatial deixis, and say that *tu* is proximal and *vous* distal. I shall suggest two reasons why such a parallel should not be drawn. The first is that there is no validity in an argument from reverse metaphor. That is, just because the [+intimate/-intimate] distinction would make a satisfying metaphorical extension from the [proximal/distal] distinction of spatial deixis, it does not follow that that is what it is, especially if the forms used give no support to the derivation. In the present case, there is no spatial content in literal uses of *tu* and *vous* to support such a derivation. The second reason is that the dominance relations between [+intimate] and [-intimate] are the wrong way round. Recall that *here* dominates *there*, in the case of TV pronouns used to signal intimacy (or lack of it), V dominates T. It is hard to demonstrate this in French, because there is no distinct intimate plural form, as there is in, for instance, German. But it can be shown. Imagine a group of people appointing one of their number as a spokesperson to address some individual. Suppose that the person chosen would naturally say *tu* to the person being addressed. Suppose further that the group contains individuals who would naturally say *vous* to the person being addressed. What form does the spokesperson choose? French native intuitions unhesitatingly opt for *vous*.

As a clue to another factor affecting the choice between T and V consider the following situation. A husband and wife jointly front a news programme on TV. When they are on the air, they address one another as *vous*; off-camera, of course, they use *tu*. Clearly neither relative social status nor intimacy can explain this. The deciding factor seems to be the formality or informality of the situation. It is at least arguable that this cannot be laid at the door of deixis at all.

15.3.5 Discourse deixis

Discourse deixis refers to such matters as the use of *this* to point to future discourse elements, that is, things which are about to be said, as in *Listen to this, it will kill you!*, and *that* to point to past discourse elements, as in *That was not a very nice thing to say*. In a similar spirit, the *hereby* of an explicit performative sentence could be said to point to current discourse: *Notice is hereby served that if payment is further delayed, appropriate legal action will be taken*.

It is sometimes claimed that certain sentence adverbs, such as *therefore* and *furthermore*, include an element of discourse deixis in their meaning, as they require the recovery of a piece of previous discourse to be understood. *Therefore* and *furthermore* could be glossed: “It follows from that” and “In addition to that”, respectively, (where *that* is a discourse deictic). A distinction can be made between discourse deixis and anaphora, although the two are obviously related. Anaphora picks up a previous reference to an extralinguistic entity and repeats it. In *John entered the room. He looked tired, he* refers to the same person that *John* refers to, but it does not strictly refer to the word *John* itself. It must be admitted that in reference to a case like *therefore* the distinction between discourse deixis and anaphora becomes somewhat blurred.

15.3.6 Psychological use of spatial deixis

It may be presumed that spatial deixis is the prototypical variety, and is certainly the source for much metaphoric generalization. A relatively simple extension is into what Langacker calls ‘abstract space’. This is exemplified by such usages as: *Here the argument runs into difficulties, What do you think of this idea of minelthat idea of George’s?* Ideas and arguments do not literally occupy space, but it is easy to think of them as if they did. This use of deixis sometimes seems to invalidate the generalization just given above regarding discourse deixis, namely, that *this* points forwards in discourse: $2 + 2 = 4$. *The truth of this proposition is guaranteed by mathematical logic*. We would have to say, here, that *this* is not discourse deictic (otherwise we would be obliged to use *that*), but means something like “the proposition we have in the forefront of our minds”.

Another extended use of spatial deixis is to signal emotive distancing or closeness:

(49) A: Here comes Jane.
B: I can’t stand that woman.

(50) This beautiful city of ours.

15-3-7 Gestural and symbolic deixis

Some uses of deictics require for their interpretation continuous monitoring of relevant aspects of the speech situation: in the clearest cases, the hearer has to be able to see the speaker and their gestures:

- (51) Put one over there and the other one here.
 (52) This is the finger that hurts, not that one.
 (53) Press the button when I give the word *now!*
 (54) I want three volunteers: you, you, and you.

These are examples of gestural deixis. In other cases, such minute monitoring

of the speech situation is not necessary, and in general, the relevant parameters for the deictic interpretation are established over relatively long periods of a conversation/discourse. This is called **symbolic** deixis:

- (55) (people at an exhibition) Isn't it interesting!
- (56) Isn't this weather gorgeous?
- (57) I've lived in this town for twenty years.
- (58) Those foreigners are always whinging.

In general, the difference between these would seem to be a matter of degree. However, there is one significant consequence of the distinction, and that is that it is only in the case of gestural use that the place denoted by *here* need not include the location of the speaker (e.g. *Will you please sign here, sir?*).

15.3.8 Deictic vs. non-deictic uses of locative expressions

It is sometimes claimed that certain locative expressions can be used either deictically or non-deictically. An example is the following:

- (59) Mary lives in the house opposite the church.
- (60) Mary lives in the house opposite.

The claim is that *opposite* is used non-deictically in (59), but deictically in (60) where it is interpreted as “the house opposite the speaker”. However, this claim is at least disputable. An alternative explanation is that in (60), *opposite* has a definite zero complement (like the latent direct object in *Mary's watching*). The definite zero complement must be inferred contextually, that is, if it is not made explicit, one must always enquire *opposite what?* In some situations, the most relevant complement will be the speaker, as in (60), but this is not necessarily the case:

- (61) Go along this road until you come to a church. Mary lives in the house opposite.

In (61), the most relevant complement is *the church*. In other words, there is no need to invoke deixis in such cases; they are explained by general principles of definiteness. A slightly more complex example involves expressions like *in front of*. Many objects have a ‘canonical’ front and back: persons, buildings, vehicles, and so on. Other objects do not have a canonical front and back: a tree, a dustbin, a lamppost. If an object X does not have a canonical front and back, the expression *in front of X* is claimed to mean generally “situated somewhere on an imaginary line between X and speaker”. If an object has a canonical front and back, then *in front of X* is ambiguous, and means either “at or near the canonical front of X” or “situated somewhere on an imaginary line between X and speaker”. The former reading is claimed to be non-deictic, and the latter reading deictic. However, the same type of objection can be made as with the so-called deictic reading of *opposite*. That is to say, the

so-called deictic reading of *in front of X* does not necessarily mean “situated somewhere on an imaginary line between X and speaker”, but “situated somewhere on an imaginary line between X and some definite reference point to be inferred from context”. Examples where the speaker is not the reference point include the following:

- (62) Follow my instructions carefully. Walk slowly towards the tree. You will find the box about one metre in front of the tree.
- (63) Tell John to follow the instructions carefully. He must walk slowly towards the tree. He will find the box one metre in front of the tree.

Again, no recourse to a special notion of deixis is called for, simply the principles governing definite reference. It is interesting to speculate whether all deixis can be explained away in this fashion. (For example, we might gloss the meaning of *I* as simply “the speaker”, leaving the principles of relevance to select the utterer of *I* as overwhelmingly the most relevant in the vast majority of circumstances.)

Discussion questions and exercises

1. Identify instances of implicit definite reference points, latent elements, etc. in the following:
 - (i) I would recommend the other route.
 - (ii) Mary will ring up and see if there's still time.
 - (iii) Turn left at the next traffic lights.
 - (iv) That's rather a lot, isn't it?
 - (v) The last sit-in was much better.
2. Point out all the instances of deixis in the following, indicating what type is involved:
 - (i) I understood that there would be an opportunity to meet her there later that week, and that I would be responsible for bringing the documents. At least, that's what John said.
 - (ii) Come out from behind there at once, Smith!
 - (iii) I met this chap at the concert, and we got talking. He said that this Xmas had been the worst he had ever spent. I'm meeting him again tomorrow.
3. Decide which of the following sentences have normal interpretations, and which have none. For those that have, specify any necessary conditions (e.g. the relative location of participants). On the basis of these data, give a concise specification of the deictic properties of **bring** and **take**.

- (i) Take it here.
- (ii) Bring it there.
- (iii) I will bring it to you.
- (iv) I will take it to you.
- (v) I will bring it to John.
- (vi) I will take it to John.
- (vii) You will take it to me.
- (viii) You will bring it to me.
- (ix) You will bring it to John.
- (x) You will take it to John.
- (xi) John will bring it to you.
- (xii) John will take it to you.
- (xiii) John will bring it to Mary.
- (xiv) John will take it to Mary.
- (xv) John told me he would bring it to you.
- (xvi) John told me he would take it to you.
- (xvii) Did John tell you he would bring it to me?
- (xviii) Did John tell you he would take it to me?
- (xix) John told me he would bring it to Mary.
- (xx) John told me he would take it to Mary.

4. Comment on the use of the bold items in the following:

- (i) The visitors will arrive at Edinburgh Waverley Station at 3.00 p.m. **Here** they will be met by our representative. (Assume the message originated in London.)
- (ii) Jackson rubbed his hands with satisfaction: he was **now** in possession of all the facts.
- (iii) I have been informed about your insubordination this morning. **This** is the third such incident this week.
- (iv) What's all **this** about you leaving next week?

Suggestions for further reading

For illuminating discussions of reference and its varieties, and definite reference in particular, see Searle (1969), Givón (1984), Chesterman (1991).

Further reading on deixis could usefully begin with Chapter 2 of Levinson (1983). See also Anderson and Keenan (1985).