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REFERENCES OF PROPER NAMES AS THE PROBLEM OF CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE*

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Abstract. This article investigates the idea that meanings of proper names are their references which is popular in the philosophy of language. The aim is to show, first, that there is no satisfactory answer to the question “How references as stable relations between words and objects appear, due to accomplishment of what conditions these properties of linguistic expressions may be produced?”, and, second, that we can still use the notion of reference in our explanations of some effects of communication if we treat reference as pragmatic rather than semantic phenomenon. The actuality of this research is provided by the fact that the identification of meanings of certain types of terms, proper names first of all, with their references is still very influential account in the philosophy of language. The author uses the methods of historical exposition and philosophical analysis of the main theories of reference, such as theory of descriptions and causal theory of reference. It is shown that these theories in their different modifications fail to explain how references as semantic relations between proper names and their bearers may be produced in the course of communication and social interaction. But although there are alternative concepts of the nature meanings of proper names it is concluded that we still may apply the notion of reference in our explanations of natural language communication if we treat reference as pragmatic effect caused by mutual coordination of actions achieved by the participants of certain communicative situation.

Key words: reference, meaning, semantic property, denotation, proper name, theory of descriptions, direct reference

1. INTRODUCTION

What are meanings of linguistic expressions? This question was the subject of philosophical discussions since antiquity. Thus, Aristotle claimed that meanings of names are conventional [1. 16a20], and that words used in speech are symbols of impressions of the souls [1. 16a3]. St. Augustine considers names as signs of external things; the relation of naming in his picture of the work of language is set by intentions and actions of speakers [2. I, P. 8]. Later two classes of names were distinguished: common and proper names respectively. Common names are considered as names of classes of things, while proper are supposed to be names of singular entities. Which

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sorts of entities proper names name is a matter of further philosophical debate. Many see language as primarily a tool of representation of the world where the speakers of the language live; in this case meaningful sentences must be true or false relative to the world and proper names and some other terms (generalized as singular expressions) as parts of sentences with some descriptive content must contribute to the meanings of those sentences certain parts of the world itself. Others see languages as primarily means of expression of subjective thoughts; in this case proper names must contribute to the meanings of sentences, understood as thoughts, subjective concepts or ideas of personal minds. But in general the meaning of a name is supposed to be its denotation identified with the class of entities that name applies or refers to, or which it singles out for its users (1). In the case of proper names and other singular terms their denotations are singular objects, events, places, individuals, states etc. If meanings of proper names are their denotations, and these denotations are singular entities, then according to the picture in question proper names are connected with particular entities by specific semantic relation called *reference* which is such that it makes a proper name in its standard (i.e. referential) use to single out for its user the very entity which is its denotation or, in other words, bearer. Reference is the main semantic feature of proper names according to this picture, and denotations are supposed to be main contributions of names to the meanings of sentences (2).

2. THE PROBLEM OF REFERENCE-PRODUCTION

This picture of the nature of meanings of proper names rooted in ancient tradition clearly presupposes that there must be some way (procedure) of attaching a name to its future bearer or, in other words, the way of assigning a denotation to the name resulting in the appearance of new reference. This procedure must somehow make a name be capable of remaining the name of certain entity over time, referring exclusively to it in all its future standard uses or under so called standard readings (unless its meaning is changed). But how exactly the name may be thus attached to particular entity or an entity to be assigned to the name as its meaning to the effect just mentioned? How, in particular, some fragment of reality, such as certain thing, individual, place or event, may be made a bearer of a name? The one may pronounce the word with an intention to apply it to certain thing, and accompany this intention with a gesture normally understood as pointing to something, but what guarantees that this intention would be realized, that the actions the person produces would be sufficient for the creation of definite reference? The one who observes these actions and understands what word in front of what objects the speaker pronounces may single out mentally from his or her environment the same fragment which the speaker supposed to single out by his/her actions and to which he/she intended to apply that word. But actions which we normally use this way cannot themselves single out some definite object in the environment of neither the speaker nor the observer. This is well illustrated by the famous example of radical translation provided by W.V.O. Quine [5. P. 28—33] where the linguist who is trying to learn completely foreign language of some tribe watches how the member of this tribe points with his finger to the rabbit and accompanies this pointing with the phrase

“Gavagai”. In spite of the fact that the gesture observed by the linguist does not differ from those which he and his linguistic community normally use for pointing to objects, he cannot say on the basis of this observation alone what exactly the gesture points to, and what the name (if it is a name in the tribal language) “Gavagai” should be applied to. The linguist has several hypotheses one of which seems the most plausible: that the gesture points to the rabbit. It seems so because in the linguistic community where the linguist belongs the same gesture in the same circumstances would be used to single out a rabbit. But taking into account possible differences between his community and the one which language and practices he tries to understand he cannot rule out other semantic alternatives, such as that the gesture points to the rabbit's fur or rabbit's meat, or rabbit's spirit, or to the appearance of the rabbit in the visual view of the speaker etc. He just doesn't have enough evidence to do this job. Gestures as such show only the direction where objects to be singled out have to be found; they don't show which objects or even types of objects have to be singled out. Yet less capable of providing this effect is the very intention to use the name in a certain way, because an intention may be or may be not fulfilled in actions.

Different proper names seem to refer to different kinds of entities. Thus, “Moscow” we understand as referring to real city, while “Mordor” as the name of some fictional place. One of the accounts of a nature of fiction identifies it with mental entity, something which is “in the head”. But there is also a hypothesis according to which all proper names refer rather to something “in the head” than to parts of the real world, i.e. to impressions or ideas of human minds, elicited in us by real things [6]. In this case gestures couldn't help us at all to attach names to their bearers because we cannot literally point by finger or other physical tool to mental entity. The one can connect an image of the name with an image of a certain thing in his or her head, and try to remember this connection, but the use of a name is not necessarily accompanied by an activation of a corresponding image in the head. What reason then do we have to think that the name was used with the reference supposedly created by such internal mechanism? And if there is no reason, as I think, then what reason do we have to believe that the reference was actually created this way? Again, I think none. Moreover, images represent only some aspects of those fragments of reality (or some other set of entities) which we suppose they are images of; if the name “Aristotle” is connected in my head with my subjective representation of Aristotle, and in someone else's head with his or her representation which may differ a lot from mine, then speaking about Aristotle we would speak about rather two different objects than about one and the same, contrary to what we normally expect from successful communication.

3. THE THEORY OF DESCRIPTIONS

There exist two main explanations of an appearance of references of proper names: theory of descriptions invented by G. Frege [4] and B. Russell [7], and causal theory of reference the main proponent of which is S. Kripke [8]. According to Frege proper names, like all expressions of natural languages, have beyond denotations also senses which contain information needed to identify their denotations. They are expressed

by descriptions of properties by which the users of the names may identify what they refer to. Also he identifies sense as the way in which the denotation is given. The assignment of meaning to a name then involves two steps: the learning of what the reference of a name is from its sense, and the identification of a denotation of the particular use of a name on the basis of this knowledge. B. Russell treats proper names (in the most of their uses in statements) as definite descriptions. That means that a thought which the subject thinks with the proper use of a proper name in general may be explicitly expressed only by substituting this name with an appropriate description [9. P. 54]. Definite descriptions are not singular terms like proper names which they are associated with; they represent properties which their denotations must satisfy [7. P. 488]. Within that semantic framework a name refers to certain object because there is a definite description associated with the standard use of this name, which may substitute it in that use, such that by understanding that description the user learns what object in the world stands for the denotation of this name.

But we know from experience that in practice we normally associate with proper names descriptions which are much less informative than those which could determine those names' references. They contain only part of the information needed in order to identify particular objects. Most of the people who use the name "Aristotle" referentially know just a couple of facts about Aristotle (e.g. that he was a Greek philosopher and a teacher of Alexander the Great). These facts then must determine according to the theory the meaning of "Aristotle" for these people. But Aristotle was not the only Greek philosopher and not the only teacher of Alexander the Great. Therefore more than one individual may satisfy this description. It cannot then provide the reference of the name "Aristotle" for those who know only these facts to the unique individual — Aristotle and no one else. Still we suppose that people who know only such facts about Aristotle may successfully participate in talks about him, and use his name to refer to him (3). Moreover, different people associate different descriptions with the referential use of certain name. The relatives of the particular person may know him or her by a set of qualities A while his or her colleagues may know him or her by another set of qualities B etc. This is consistent as with the existence of one and the same individual given under different descriptions so with the existence of different individuals determined each by certain description.

Another famous argument against theory of descriptions is the modal one. Its author, S. Kripke, says that the sentence "Aristotle is Aristotle" differs from the sentence "Aristotle is so-and-so", where "so-and-so" stands for some definite description of all facts known about Aristotle, in that whereas the second might be false the first is necessarily true. Both may be true in the actual world, but it might be that someone else, not Aristotle, had all the features ascribed to the individual by the description on the right side of the second sentence (in other words, there is such possible world accessible from the actual one that in it Aristotle is not so-and-so). On the other hand it might not be that Aristotle was not himself (no possible world accessible from the actual one is such that there exists Aristotle and he is not Aristotle). It follows according to the argument that no description, however detailed, determines the reference of a proper name [8. P. 30, 74].

There is a modification of the theory of descriptions according to which disjunctions of definite descriptions are senses of proper names [10. P. 180ff]; this approach is known as cluster theory of descriptions. But if we define Aristotle as, say, the student of Plato *or* the teacher of Alexander the Great we create the possibility that two different individuals satisfy these two descriptions from which it would follow that the reference of the name “Aristotle” is ambiguous (4). Besides this theory does not solve the following problem: since some essential constituents of the object's existence are left unrepresented by descriptions associated with the particular use of its name these descriptions would represent rather the bearers of properties which they describe than some particular object. There is also the version of theory of descriptions which proposes to understand “something named N” as the sense of a name “N” (5). But in this case we can also forget about name's unambiguousness because different entities may be called by the same name. Besides, as Kripke notices, the name “Socrates”, for example, could be applicable to Socrates even if his contemporaries did not call him Socrates [8. P. 68—70]. Katz objects that “Socrates” is the name of Socrates even if some people do not call Socrates Socrates [11. P. 8]. But he interprets “N does not exist” as saying that nothing is a thing which has some property P and is called N by actual users of the language where “N” belongs [11. P. 23—24]. But then if we treat “Moses does not exist” this way we would get something quite different from what we expect: that there is no bearer of the name “Moses” which satisfies its contemporary use by actual users of English (6). But this is definitely false because there are many individuals which are bearers of that name for contemporary users of English. Finally some defenders of the theory of descriptions admit that senses of names do not fully determine their references, that some extralinguistic information is needed [11. P. 11]. But in this case it may be noticed that the more extralinguistic information is needed the less reference of a name depends on definite descriptions associated with its proper use (7).

4. DIRECT REFERENCE AND CAUSAL THEORY OF REFERENCE

Critics of the theory of description insist that proper names have direct references, which means that they refer to things directly, not due to some associated senses, and hence that their references are not determined by definite descriptions. Thus according to J.S. Mill names may refer to things independently on how their properties correlate with connotations (senses) of these names [13. P. 1, 2, 5, 33]. He gives the following illustration of the independence of denotations of proper names from their senses. The town Dartmouth according to the descriptive content of its name is the town in the mouth of the river Dart. But over time the channel of the river Dart had moved so that Dartmouth ceased to be in the mouth of Dart; still it is the same town, although its identity is not fixed by its location relative to the river Dart.

According to Kripke proper names unlike definite description are rigid designators, i.e. expressions which refer each to the same thing in all possible worlds were this thing exists [8. P. 48—49] (8). How then names get attached to their bearers the result of which is an appearance of stable references to them from the point of view of the proponents of direct reference? According to S. Kripke proper names directly refer to their bearers

because those are assigned to names historically, and any such history of name's use begins with the situation of immediate acquaintance with the object of reference. In order to refer to the thing with the help of a proper name it is sufficient that the use of this name be in the right causal relation to the use in which that name was attached to this thing [8. P. 91—96]. In other words, the current use of a name must be the result of some historically antecedent use where the name was attached to the object. That picture of a creation of reference presupposes the following. Some people once assigned to certain boy whom they were personally acquainted with the name "Aristotle", the boy then grew up and became a philosopher, and did things which made him famous. He is known to people who didn't know him personally by these deeds, but they are able to refer to him by using the word "Aristotle" not because they know certain facts about him but because their use of that name is derivative from its use by those who once baptized certain boy with that name, because there is a constant chain of communicative interactions linking current use of the name with its initial use and some situation of baptizing. In order to incorporate the use of a name into such chain of interactions one need to (try to) use this name in the same way as it was used by certain people in the past.

But an important element is missing from this picture: nothing is said about the particular mechanisms which should provide the result of attaching of a name to an object in the situation of baptizing. We can identify certain action as action of baptizing by its observable features: we can say that if someone points to a particular object (what we think is the object one intends to distinguish) and says something like "This is A" he is trying to attach the name "A" to that object. But we cannot observe the result, the fact that the name was attached, that the expression *became* the name of the object, and the object became that name's bearer. We could infer such results from the observation of historical consequences of the act of baptizing. But the consequences we are interested in are unobservable: we would have to see that the name actually *is* the name of that particular object for certain group of that name's users. But in order to see this we should be able to observe the very relation of reference between the name and the object. But reference as such is unobservable. According to the theory, causal dependence on certain use is what makes the use of a name referring to a particular thing. But the derivative use may have definite reference only if the use which semantic features it historically inherits had that reference. But in order to say whether it had that reference we have to know that the uses causally derivative from it have that reference. That creates a circle in explanation.

There is also the following description of the mechanism of creation of reference by participants of the situation of baptizing. Both the baptizers and the observers experience the impact from the object baptized which causes in them its perception; as a result the observer acquires an ability (if he/she has corresponding linguistic competence) to refer to the object in question with certain name. Any use of that name in which that ability is realized has an effect of referring to the object in question due to the causal link between this object and this use [15. P. 67]. But the causal link in question connects only objects with their perceptions, not perceptions with the use of a name. When I say that Aristotle is the greatest ancient philosopher, my use of the name "Aristotle" is not

caused by any perception of Aristotle (and not by some recollection which could be caused by the perception in question). Suppose, I see that certain boy is named Peter, and the perception of Peter, caused by him in me, is the cause of my thought “This is Peter”, where “this” has, let's suppose, a direct reference to what is immediately observed (certain boy). Since this thought itself includes the use of a proper name, this is the simplest case of the use of a name caused by an interaction with particular object. But the use of a name may be causally dependent on the interaction with certain object while its meaning may be causally independent on it. Actually the notion of the use of a term is ambiguous: it may mean either the occurrence of the term in a discourse with certain meaning or its pronouncement or writing with certain intention. Causal impact from the object may determine intention, but not necessarily determines the meaning. Also we may notice that representations of objects which agents of communication normally use in thoughts are results of different sorts of stimulation, not all of which are caused by corresponding objects themselves (and in many cases most of these stimulations have other sources). Taking this into account we have to admit that references of many our proper names understood in the considered way are causally ambiguous. As a result, how exactly appears an ability to refer to objects by using names on the basis of causal links between these objects and their perceptions is still unclear. Moreover, an object in particular situation causes in agents its partial sensational representations; from this it may follow for the causal theory that names are attached not to objects but to their mental representations. But since such representations are qualitatively distinct from an object which caused them an ability to refer to these representations is not an ability to refer to that object. An object may change over time, but if the agent can only refer to some representation of it which fixes some set of its temporal features which it has no more (or even to that object *under* that representation) there would be no reference of the expected sort, the reference to something which remains the same in different perceptual representations.

5. CONCLUSION

Therefore the question “How names succeed to become connected with their bearers by relation of reference?” is still open. There is still no theory of reference which could satisfactorily explain this phenomenon. No surprise that this situation in contemporary philosophy of language stimulates alternative concepts of the nature of meanings of proper names according to which their meanings are identified, e.g., with mental entities [16; 17] or abstractions like inferential [18; 19] or conceptual [20; 21] roles these terms play in corresponding languages.

I think that in spite of this criticism there may be preserved some explanative role for the notion of reference. But it is better seen as pragmatic rather than semantic concept: it is true that we can refer to things by use of words, but it is very doubtful that we can do this because our words, proper names in particular, are connected with these things by semantic relations of reference. Many uses of proper names are such that the public pronouncement of a name in certain context causes the reaction part of which is a coordination of actions between the speaker and the hearers when they pick out

from the environment the same object as an appropriate one (or accommodate it if it is not given) and deal with it as if it is that object which is referred to by the name. We still may consider an object which is regularly picked out this way in response to the use of a certain name this name's denotation, but just because it plays certain role in an achievement of coordination of individual pragmatic responses to certain linguistic stimuli, not because it participates in a semantic relation of reference.

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NOTES

- (1) Cr. the following definition: “denotation of a term is the class of all actual or existing things to which this term applies properly” [3. P. 238]. Although many names refer to actual or existing things there are as well such that are supposed to refer to something not real or even nonexistent (“Pegasus”, e.g.). Do these names have denotations or are they empty is a question which was intensively discussed in the philosophy of language. Still it seems at least plausible that if names may refer to real things they might refer to things which are not real as well.
- (2) Some think though that this concerns only so called extensional contexts while in intensional contexts (such as contexts of propositional attitude) singular terms would contribute their senses if only they have some (see [4]).
- (3) Cr. the argument by S. Kripke who says that the name may be understood without having access to the information which is sufficient to identify the referent of that name [8. P. 81].
- (4) Of course most names of natural languages are ambiguous because different people and groups may use them with different meanings. But yet we presume that a name may have definite reference for certain group or community within certain use or under certain reading.
- (5) See: [12. P. 319—48; 11. P. 31—61].
- (6) Cr. also [8. P. 31].
- (7) Some philosophers still claim that theory of descriptions was not refuted [11; 12]. But neither is there good argument which would show that there are definite descriptions truly synonymous to proper names they are associated with. “The first man stepped on the surface of Moon” if properly understood motivates to single out one and the only person which is in fact Neil Armstrong. But that does not yet mean that it refers to Neil Armstrong and therefore is synonymous to “Neil Armstrong”. Rather it refers to whoever is in fact the one who satisfies that description.
- (8) On the other hand some philosophers assume that definite descriptions may have direct references too [14].

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РЕФЕРЕНЦИИ СОБСТВЕННЫХ ИМЕН КАК ПРОБЛЕМА СОВРЕМЕННОЙ ФИЛОСОФИИ ЯЗЫКА

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В этой статье исследуется популярная в философии языка идея, что значениями собственных имен являются их референции. Цель статьи — показать, во-первых, что нет удовлетворительного ответа на вопрос «Как появляются референции как стабильные отношения между словами и объектами, за счет выполнения каких условий эти свойства языковых выражений могут создаваться?» и, во-вторых, что мы по-прежнему можем использовать понятие референции для объяснения некоторых коммуникативных эффектов, если будем трактовать ее как скорее прагматический, чем семантический феномен. Актуальность этого исследования обеспечивается тем, что отождествление значений некоторых типов терминов, прежде всего собственных имен, с их референциями — до сих пор весьма влиятельный подход в философии языка. Автор использует методы исторической экспозиции и философского анализа основных теорий референции, таких как теория дескрипций и каузальная теория референции. Показано, что эти теории в разных их модификациях не могут объяснить, как референции как семантические отношения между собственными именами и их носителями могут создаваться в процессе коммуникации и социальной интеракции. Но хотя существуют альтернативные концепции природы значений собственных имен, автор приходит к заключению, что мы по-прежнему можем использовать понятие референции в наших объяснениях естественно-языковой коммуникации, если будем понимать референцию как прагматический

феномен, вызываемый взаимной координацией действий, достигаемой между участниками определенной коммуникативной ситуации.

Ключевые слова: референция, значение, семантическое свойство, денотация, собственное имя, теория дескрипций, прямая референция

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