

Referring to ‘what counts as the referent’: a view from linguistics¹

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As defined here, a speaker’s act of referring is the speaker’s use of a language expression in the course of talking about its denotatum. This pragmatic definition of reference is defended against more traditional usage that contrasts “referring”, “denoting”, “describing”, “alluding”, “attributing”, etc. It is proposed that the various differences in meaning supposedly captured by the different applications of these terms are better dealt with in other ways that can make shaper distinctions.

What the hearer recognizes as the speaker’s referent necessarily only ‘counts as the referent’ because it is on many occasions not identical to what the speaker identifies, indeed the speaker and hearer might even have entirely contradictory conceptions of the referent and yet the language expression used by the speaker can be said to successfully refer. Consider some examples. In *President Clinton was a baby in 1946* the speaker refers to (on my definition) two temporally distinct manifestations of Bill Clinton. If Sue says to Ed *My husband’s having an affair with his boss* it is perfectly possible for Ed (and us) to understand which two persons are being referred to in such a way as to distinguish them in subsequent discourse, even though neither Ed nor us have ever met either of them. Sue’s referent for “my husband” will not be identical with Ed’s referent, though the referent for each of speaker and hearer counts as the same for the given occasion of talk. If the Archbishop of Canterbury says to Richard Dawkins *I will offer proof of the existence of God* and Dawkins replies *But God does not exist*, the deity that they are both referring to only counts as the same referent, because for the Archbishop God exists and for the author of *The God Delusion* God does not; in fact they have almost contradictory conceptions of the referent. This essay argues that an expression *e* frequently cannot identify exactly the same referent *r* for speaker and hearer, and that it is in fact unnecessary for it to do so; all that is required is that the referent counts as the same referent for the purpose of the communication. This is why mistaken reference like *Who’s the teetotaller with the glass of water?* spoken of a man quaffing a glass of vodka can often successfully communicate who it is that is being spoken of; and attributives like the subject NP of *The person who designed Stonehenge was a genius* refers to whomsoever the designer was just as efficiently as *The architect of La Sagrada Familia was a genius* refers, implicitly, to Antoni Gaudí.

1. I am very grateful to Kent Bach, Thorstein Fretheim, Arthur Sullivan, and Sali Mufwene for comments on an earlier version of this essay which led me to rethink and clarify some issues. I believe it unlikely that any of these scholars will endorse the view of reference put forward here. All faults herein are mine alone.

Keywords: referring; explicit/implicit reference; attribution; description; common ground; pract (pragmatic act)

1. Preliminary remarks

In order to have a consistent means for speaking about what language users do with language, in this essay I define reference much more liberally than most philosophers and many linguists. For me **reference is a speaker's use of a language expression in the course of talking about (referring to) its denotatum.**² In short, my topic is **a speaker's act of referring.** This is a pragmatic conception of reference completely at odds with, say, Kaplan's conception of semantic reference (Kaplan 1989b: 491 n.13). For me, a referent is something the speaker (or writer or signer) talks about on a given occasion and so a referent can be many different types of entity: a particular, a universal, a proposition, an existent, a hypothetical entity or situation, even a non-existent – although reference to these last two categories is achieved only implicitly.³ Many philosophers will say that linguistic representations of most

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2. Immediately we have a terminological problem with the term *denotatum*. Loosely distinguished: a speaker refers, the language denotes. For me a language expression *e* denotes (designates, if you will) something in a world – mostly outside of language, e.g. a knife, an act of killing, a state of desperation, a manner of moving, but also (within language) a noun, a predicate. A speaker uses *e* to refer to something that falls within the domain of what *e* can denote, though sometimes pushing the envelope. That which is denoted is the denotatum. As will become clear, it is not the case for me that a speaker *refers* to individuals and *denotes* general concepts.
 3. Abbott 2010: 3 allows that “[O]n the semantic conception [of reference] most kinds of linguistic expressions might be considered to have reference – not only NPs but verbs and verb phrases (VPs), adjectives and adverbs, etc.” I don't see why this cannot just as well apply to the pragmatic conception of reference. Incidentally, my definition of *reference* is close to lay usage, as demonstrated by the following four examples from corpora. (1, D17 3385 ACE Corpus) **Referring** to the eclipse or corruption of religion, he wrote: “Should the lamp of religion be obscured, chaos and confusion will ensue, and the lights of fairness, of justice, of tranquillity and peace cease to shine.” (2, A06 170 LOB Corpus) **Referring** to previous negotiations, Mr Macmillan looked towards Mr Reginald Maudling. (3, E17 30 LOB Corpus) Well, Polish coach Felix Stam, **referring** to the omission of such stars as Pietrzykowski, Adamski, Drogosz and Pazdior in Belgrade, declared – “They are too old.” (4, G17 0360 BROWN Corpus) But I

of these cannot function as referring expressions, which instead may be “allusive”, “attributive” or “descriptive”.

There are many different views and definitions of *reference* (see for example Abbott 2010; Almog, Perry and Wettstein (eds) 1989; Bach 1987; 2008; Gundel and Hedberg (eds) 2008; MacBride 2006; Sullivan 2006; 2012). Among philosophers there is considerable variation but the most uncontroversial “referring expressions” are demonstratives (*this, that*), proper names (*London, Peter Strawson*), personal pronouns (*she, it, them*), and definite NPs (*the computer*) such as “can occur as the subject of what would traditionally be regarded as singular subject-predicate sentence” (Strawson 1950: 320). One might generalize to say that the usual conception of reference limits it to constant individuated concepts to which a speaker (or the language expression S uses) draws to audience attention; on this view, general terms (e.g. *mats*) denote and don't refer. Strawson wrote:

I have explained identifying reference – or the central case of identifying reference – as essentially involving a presumption, on the speaker's part, of the possession by the audience of identifying knowledge of a particular item. Identifying knowledge is knowledge of the existence of a particular item distinguished, in one or another sense, by the audience from any other. (Strawson 1964: 101)

A little further on Strawson insists that the audience already knows of the “existence and uniqueness” of the referent and it is “no part of the speaker's intention [...] to inform the audience of the existence of” it. Abbott 2010: 9 writes: “philosophical and linguistic research has yielded no clear-cut, obviously correct criterion for identifying either those NPs which encode the possibility for referential use, or those NPs which can be said to have a referent (in such-and-such an utterance).” In the course of this essay I hope to show that the meaningful distinctions often attributed to the terms *refer* and *denote* need not be abandoned on my conception of reference, but some more explicit and less controversial labelling will be required.

suspect that the old Roman was **referring** to change made under military occupation – the sort of change which Tacitus was talking about when he said, “They make a desert, and call it peace” (“Solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant”).

2. The nature of reference

“Mentioning”, or “referring”, is not something an expression does; it is something that someone can use an expression to do. Mentioning, or referring to, something is a characteristic of a *use* of an expression, just as “being about” something, and truth-or-falsity, are characteristics of a *use* of a sentence. (Strawson 1950: 326)

Where I differ from Strawson and many others is in a wider interpretation of “identifying knowledge of [...] the existence of a particular item”; and I allow that it can be part of a speaker’s intention to inform the hearer of the existence of whatever the speaker is referring to. Bach 2008: 16 writes: “Speaker reference is a four-place relation, between a speaker, an expression, an audience, and a referent: you use an expression to refer someone to something.” This I agree with, though I have a much wider interpretation of the term *reference* than Bach does. I strongly adhere to Strawson’s dictum that referring is characteristic of the **use** of an expression; and I claim that, if it were to make any sense at all to say that “an expression refers”, this is a function of the fact that it is either typically or on occasion used by speakers to refer. Referring is very obviously a pragmatic act: it is situated in a particular context (of both utterance and world spoken of) and “the rules of language and of society synergize in determining meaning, intended as a socially recognized object sensitive to social expectations about the situation in which the utterance to be interpreted is embedded” (Capone 2005: 1357; see also Wettstein 1989: 432). What is less obvious is that a hearer’s recognition of the speaker’s reference is also a pragmatic act of interpretation that uses common ground (which I will describe in a moment) to make sense of the utterance. Literary criticism, academic and legal argument (or the like) flourish because the “same” text can be interpreted differently by different hearers and readers, surely proving that interpretation is active not passive. In the ensuing discussion, we shall see some of what is involved in this process.

To start the argument, if Joe utters (1) then Joe refers to someone called Saddam Hussein whom he supposes his audience is able to identify from common ground.

(1) Saddam Hussein is dead.

Common ground is constituted from discourse context, situation of utterance, and input from relevant encyclopaedic knowledge.⁴ On my definition of reference, the speaker of (1) is talking about Saddam's death at some unspecified time in the past and thus referring to that. Furthermore, in ordinary lay language, a speaker would be said to be referring to Saddam's death in (1); to exclude it from "referring" by stipulation is inappropriate without rational grounds being given, and I have seen none. This analysis takes reference beyond certain constituents of propositions to propositions themselves – or, more precisely, to a proposition used by a speaker on a given occasion.⁵ Just like Saddam Hussein himself, the fact of his death is a singular entity, and so ought to fall within the philosopher's canon of referring expressions. Any conceptual difference between identifying an individual such as Saddam and identifying the purported fact of this death correlate directly with what Systemic Functional Grammar calls the lexicogrammar, and investigations of such differences (along with those for the different kinds of reference/denotation of different types of verbs and adjectives, adverbs, etc.) require a finer tool than a controversial distinction between the application of such terms of analysis as *refer*, *describe*, *denote*, *allude*, etc. There is no reason to exclude the potential of the predicate in (1) to refer on grounds that it is non-corporeal (after all, Saddam himself is non-corporeal today). If the speaker were intending to remind the hearer of Saddam's death, the statement falls within Strawson's criterion of "knowledge of the existence of a particular item" (Strawson 1964). Of course, it is more likely that Joe believes he is informing the hearer that Saddam is dead, a function which Strawson disallows as an act of referring. But I can see no value in Strawson's stricture. In short, speakers may refer to (purported) facts. It happens that it is true that Saddam is dead: Joe's utterance of (1)

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4. See Allan 2012; Clark 1996; Clark, Schreuder and Butterick 1983; Lee 2001; Stalnaker 1973; 1974; 2002. Common ground for any community K of two or more people that include speaker and hearer is that:
- (a) every member, or almost every member, of K knows or believes some fact or set of facts F; and
 - (b) a member is presumed to know or believe F by (almost) every other member of K; and
 - (c) a member of K knows that both (a) and (b) are true.

When a member of K applies knowledge of F in order to interpret P, a state of affairs or something said, s/he can presume that others in the community will also apply knowledge of F in order to interpret P. The existence of F, P, and the application of knowledge of F to interpreting P is common ground for members of the community K. Once attended to, P becomes part of F, incrementing the common ground.

5. A proposition is the denotation of a sentence, cf. Abbott 2010: 7f; Castañeda 1989.

states a true fact. Had Ed said *Saddam Hussein is alive and well in 2011* he would also have been referring to a purported fact, but this time it is false – Ed was either ignorant of the truth or deliberately lying for some reason. But Ed is nonetheless referring. Reference is no guarantee of truthfulness or accuracy; those must be judged on other grounds.

For some people (e.g. Reimer 2003) reference is naming. The verb *name* is ambiguous (cf. Kaplan 1989a: 602): *I name this ship 'Sea Nymph'* is an act of baptism in the sense of Kripke 1972; I am here using the post-baptism sense of *name* as 'picking out a particular name bearer'. Referring and naming are closely correlated, and in the context of this paper it is true that to name is to refer; but the relationship is asymmetric because to refer is not to name. Although it is arguable that in *A great architect designed this church* one of the referents is 'named a church', for convenience I shall here restrict (the term) *naming* to the use of a proper name to identify a unique individual such as la Sagrada Família or a unique set as in *the Rockies* or *the Grateful Dead* (see Allan 2001; Lehrer 2006; Reimer 2006). Because naming is a type of referring, naming is (by logical transitivity) a pragmatic act. The hearer's recognition of the name-bearer is also, therefore, a pragmatic act.

A speaker's act of referring is the speaker's use of a language expression in the course of talking about its (purported) denotatum to an audience. What the hearer recognizes as the speaker's referent necessarily only **counts as the referent** because it is on many occasions not identical to what the speaker identifies (cf. Colston 2008: 173); indeed the speaker and hearer might have substantially different, even contradictory, conceptions of the referent – and yet the language expression used by the speaker can be said to successfully refer such that the hearer recognizes the referent well enough for the communicative act to be judged successful by both speaker and hearer. The hearer recognizes the referent well enough if s/he is able to speak about that referent cogently and, if required, ascribe certain properties to it; the hearer does not need to be able to identify the referent as a physical entity.⁶ For a philosopher, reference appears to be restricted to identifying a particular (mostly singular) entity in the real world or more generally entities that have extension in worlds and times accessible from the real world. For the linguist, however, it is more important to be able to identify what the speaker is (apparently) talking about when addressing the hearer in a given context, in order to tie the way that is achieved to the language expressions used.

6. Wettstein 1989: 423, 439 says something similar, citing Kripke as an authority.

Consider (2).

(2) A great architect designed this church.

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

In order to clarify the significance of context on the interpretation of (2), I propose that the following condition be placed on it: in Figure 1, S (she) utters (2) to H (him) when standing in front of building B. Anyone who has been to El Temple de la Sagrada Família will be aware that it is visually dominant such that an utterance of (2) made when standing in front of it will unambiguously refer to la Sagrada Família unless the speaker is very obviously NOT referring to it because, for instance, s/he is pointing to a picture or description of another church (such as a guide book entry for the Basilica di San Marco).

Given my definition of reference, the speaker of (2) can legitimately be reported as referring to Antoni Gaudí, la Sagrada Família, and the fact that Gaudí designed la Sagrada Família. However, this interpretation depends on considerable inferencing from contextual and encyclopaedic data. In (2) uttered by S to H in the context described by Figure 1, “this church” refers to B (because of its visual salience) without any recourse being necessary to the name of the church. In other words, the name of B is necessarily an additional inference from common ground. “La Sagrada Família” serves to identify the referent by naming it appropriately, but the name itself is not any part of (2). There are two things of interest here: how the reference to B is established, and how the referent is correlated with the name *Sagrada Família*. The subject NP of (2), *A great architect*, refers to the architect of B; the architect is not named and S does not necessarily know his name – she may simply be impressed by the architectural brilliance of B. If either S or H can name the architect it will be sourced from encyclopaedic knowledge (see Allan 2001; 2006) through identifying the church, probably, though not necessarily, by name.

According to Bach 2008:16, using an indefinite such as “A great architect” in (2) the speaker at best “alludes” to somebody if s/he has someone specific in mind, but s/he does not “refer” to that person. In my paragraph just above it is suggested that the speaker is talking about whoever the architect may be: Bach takes such attributives to “describe” what is spoken of (see also Abbott 2010: 263–270 which uses “speak of”). “Neither alluding to an individual nor singling one out descriptively counts as referring to it – you are not expressing a singular

proposition about it" (*ibid.* 19).⁷ As a linguist, I cannot see the value in these distinctions between "referring", "alluding", and "describing" or "speaking of", nor the special status awarded to expressing a singular proposition – what about all the other things we do with language? To subsume such speaker "allusion" and "description" to the speaker's act of referring, as I do, does not obscure the differences in meaning among those types of expression which (presumably) underlie Bach's distinctions.⁸

The correspondence between reference and extension is complicated. Given the context of utterance defined by (2), "this church" has extension in whatever world S and H inhabit and is contemporaneous with them. S and H are recognizably fictitious characters restricted to Figure 1 and the discussion presented by the author of this essay. For readers of the essay, "this church" has extension in Figure 1 and, because the Figure depicts a church that exists in the world that my readers also inhabit, the church has extension in their real world. The reference to a great architect⁹ also identifies an entity which has extension in whatever world S and H inhabit and the world which readers of this essay inhabit; but whereas la Sagrada Família still has extension in our world, its architect no longer does (he died in 1926).

Let's consider some things that can go wrong with (2). Ordinarily, the complex demonstrative *this church* refers to the most salient church in the foreground of attention;¹⁰ it counts as what Reimer 2003 calls a "standard" reference. It identifies a necessary condition of the pragmeme for a particular kind of pragmatic act of reference that is clearly generalizable

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7. Bach's position is basically similar to that of Russell 1905. A singular proposition is the content of a sentence containing an indicator that makes direct reference in Kaplan's sense. "The directly referential term goes directly to its referent, *directly* in the sense that it does not first pass through the proposition" (Kaplan 1989a: 569). Thus a singular proposition such as *Socrates was curious* is a statement about the man himself, not the name "Socrates" (see Abbott 2010: 34; Castañeda 1989: 114).
 8. I am not suggesting that the differences between any of e.g. universals vs particulars, definites vs indefinites, proper names vs descriptive names, etc. are uninteresting or irrelevant, just that to label some "referring terms" and others "allusive", "attributive" or "descriptive" is not the optimal way to differentiate them with respect to meaning.
 9. Or, if you prefer, to 'some x such that x is a great architect'.
 10. The phrase 'this church' is not a complex demonstrative when introducing the referent into the foreground of attention as in *Yesterday I came across this church with a gold-plated roof. It was just such an amazing sight.*

to a wide variety of occasions, as we shall see. There are several reasons for thinking that, in the situation of utterance described by Figure 1, to refer using “this church” would be unambiguous. One is that S will know at least roughly where she is and under most circumstances, so will H. Even if S and H had not planned to be in front of la Sagrada Família and merely happened upon it, they would see¹¹ that (based on encyclopaedic knowledge) B looks like a church. They might also know that there is a church called (El Temple de) la Sagrada Família (or a translation of that name into another language). Ordinarily, but not necessarily, this will be strengthened by additional information such as knowledge of its approximate location and appearance, and/or some idea of its history and who designed it. It is conceivable that S is not aware of the name of the church; nevertheless, (2) would still be a credible utterance and so would (3), in which S accesses her encyclopaedic knowledge.

(3) This church must be the one that was designed by Gaudí.

Suppose S utters (2) in the context given by Figure 1 but S mistakenly believes the church is La Seu (la Catedral de Santa Eulàlia), so that she could honestly comment on (2) by saying (4).

(4) In saying *a great architect designed this church* I am talking about La Seu.

It is clear that there is nothing wrong with (2) on account of (4). The referential pract¹² is successful: S could honestly believe that a great architect designed B, referred to using “this church”. The error that (4) reveals is the naming of B: in the context obtaining, (4) is referentially incorrect only because B is wrongly named “La Seu”.

Let’s now take the case of (5) as uttered by H to S in the context described by Figure 2.

11. I’m assuming neither is blind. Blindness would complicate matters, but not invalidate the general argument.

12. Mey 2001: 221 writes: ‘The theory of pragmatic acts [... focuses] on the environment in which both speaker and hearer find their affordances, such that the entire situation is brought to bear on what can be said in the situation, as well as on what is actually being said. [...T]he emphasis is not on conditions and rules for an individual (or an individual’s) speech act, but on characterizing a general situational prototype, capable of being executed in the situation; such a generalized pragmatic act I will call a *pragmeme*. The instantiated individual pragmatic acts, [...] *practs*, refer to a particular pragmeme in its realizations.’

(5) A great architect designed this church.

INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE

H's referent for "this church" is readily identified as B, which is church-like even though it is in fact a mosque. Whether or not H (the speaker of (5)) can name the building as the Great Mosque of Djenné is irrelevant to S's successful interpretation of the utterance in (5) as referring to B. Once again, reference can be successful because of appropriate use of the pract: a certain kind of act is performed (namely, referring) in a certain kind of context – before B, which is an appropriate possible referent. Another example of misattribution that can refer successfully is suggested by Donnellan 1966: 287: the complex demonstrative in the question *Who's that teetotaller with a glass of water?* spoken of someone quaffing a glass of neat vodka can successfully refer insofar as the same person is recognized by both speaker and hearer as the one being spoken of, no matter what s/he is drinking. Mistaken reference will obviously be unsuccessful more frequently than 'correct' reference, but it doesn't cease to be reference (on my definition).

It is clear from (2), (4), and (5), that successful reference to B using "this church" is independent of the correct naming of B and even independent of whether B is literally a church, which it isn't in Figure 2. This success is a function of the pragmeme that appropriately combines the language material with situational data, drawing attention to B by employing the complex demonstrative phrase *this church*. Consequently, the default interpretation of the constituent "this church" merely needs to be 'the most salient church or church-like building in the foreground of attention'. I take this to be the default referent of "this church" in (2), (4), and (5).

Let's return now to Figure 1. If H had attributed the correct name to the church referred to in (2), the resulting nonmonotonic inference, what Levinson 2000 calls an I-implicature, would be as shown in (6). If H wrongly believed that the church referred to is la Catedral de Santa Eulàlia, the implicature would be as shown in (7).

- (6) H understands that S says 'a great architect designed the most salient church(-like thing) in the foreground of attention' +> a great architect designed La Sagrada Família.
- (7) H understands that S says 'a great architect designed the most salient church(-like thing) in the foreground of attention' +> a great architect designed La Seu.

(6) is an appropriate interpretation of (2) in which S's reference to the church in (2) uttered under the conditions specified in Figure 1 achieves success just because it instantiates the proper pragmeme. The S refers by means of a complex demonstrative to an entity in the world spoken of, namely B, that is readily identified. In (7) pragmatic integrity ensures that the referent of "this church" was recognized correctly as B; the fault is that the wrong name was (perhaps temporarily) assigned to B.

Suppose S were to follow up (2) with (8):

(8) In saying *A great architect designed this church*, I (S) meant that whoever [it may have been that] designed la Sagrada Família (B) was a great architect.

Let's make the default assumption that S is speaking felicitously, that is, she has genuine aesthetic grounds for stating her opinion that the design of B is such that it must be the work of "a great architect". It is notable that this may be a so-called "attributive" usage (as per Donnellan 1966) where S cannot name the architect. However (8) is also appropriate when S is able to correctly name the architect; her judgment of his skill is based on this building alone. In such a case, the optimal phraseology (without actually naming Gaudí) would be (9).

(9) In saying *A great architect designed this church*, I (S) meant that the person who designed la Sagrada Família (B) was a great architect.

However, (9) is ambiguous between what Donnellan called "attributive" and "referential" uses: "the person who designed la Sagrada Família" can be "attributive" (refer to whosoever the architect was) or, alternatively, refer to Gaudí. As an "attributive", the role of the senses of the indefinite description is direct or, the better to avoid misconstrual, **explicit**; when (2) or (9) is referring to Gaudí, the role of the sense is to make implicit reference. To be explicitly referring to Gaudí, the speaker would need to name him in the utterance, as in *Antoni Gaudí designed la Sagrada Família* ((18) below). **The locution typically identifies a speaker's explicit reference; the implicit reference is achieved via monotonic or nonmonotonic inference.**

At this stage it behoves me to explain why I have been putting quotes around the word *attributive* when discussing attributive uses of definite descriptions. It is because the attributive (from which I'm now dropping the quotes) is often contrasted with the referential, but I would insist that, given my definition of referring, in using attributives a speaker nonetheless refers. What characterizes an attributive such as "The person who designed

Stonehenge” in (10) is that the identity of the referent is unknown and never likely to be known, but the speaker is nonetheless referring to that person who existed in prehistoric times in order to predicate a compliment of him (or, less probably, her).¹³

(10) The person who designed Stonehenge was very accomplished.

The difference between the referent of the attributive interpretation of “A great architect” in (2) given in (8) or (9) and that of the attributive in (10) is that the identity of the former is known (if not to S or H, then to us) whereas the identity of the latter is not. The true identity of a referent is not necessarily crucial for communicative success. In (11) the final “it” refers implicitly to an as yet unidentified member of the set of chocolates offered, one that will never be identifiable if the offer is refused such that the prediction fails to materialize. The reference, then, is to an entity in a hypothetical irrealis world.

(11) Take one of these lovely chocolates. I’m sure you’ll enjoy it.

(12) Eat this chocolate. I’m sure you’ll enjoy it.

In both (11) and (12), “it” satisfies the Bach description, quoted earlier, of “a four-place relation, between a speaker, an expression, an audience, and a referent”. In both, the final pronoun “it” refers implicitly via the proposition in which it occurs and it correlates with an antecedent. Whereas the antecedent in (11), “one of these lovely chocolates”, also refers implicitly¹⁴ via the proposition in which it occurs to an unspecified member of a bounded set, the antecedent in (12) refers explicitly to the demonstrated chocolate, specified as a particular.

In uttering (13), the speaker refers to the universal (set of) “all spiders”:

(13) All spiders have a cephalothorax and an abdomen.

A nominalist will dispute the realist’s claim that universals exist; but that is of no concern to most speakers of English who are aware that, whether or not there is an extension for the universal *all spiders* there is no question about the existence of spiders in this world and

13. If it turned out that there was more than one designer of Stonehenge, (10) would be taken to refer to all of them. This is the situation with respect to the name *Homer* as author of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* which – as they have come down to us – were composed by more rhapsodists than Homer, yet it is found convenient to refer to their author as, simply, *Homer*. Our understanding is not increased by pedantically recasting *Homer* as a collective noun.

14. In terms of Bach 2008, this describes instead of refers.

ordinary speakers have a conception of the meaning of the quantifier *all* ranging over spiders. Given my definition of reference, this is all that is required for a speaker to refer in using “all spiders” in (13). A speaker can also implicitly refer to something that is known not to exist by means of referring explicitly to the fact of its nonexistence as in (14). In (15) there is implicit reference to something whose existential status is uncertain. In (16) explicit reference is made to an entity that is fictional.

(14) *No human* has walked on Mars.

(15) Is there life on Mars?

(16) [Raymond Chandler's] *Philip Marlowe* is my favourite shamus.

In (14) the speaker refers to the planet Mars, and to a certain fact asserted about Mars. Many philosophers will dispute that it is possible to refer to a non-entity as opposed to, say, having it in mind. Whether or not the NP “no human” refers to a non-entity (*nullus*), it is clear that the speaker of (14) refers to a (negative) fact about Mars which can be assessed for its truth. The speaker of (15) also refers to Mars and questions the possible fact of existence of life on that planet – thus referring implicitly to (hypothetical) life on Mars. The speaker of (16) refers to a certain fact (personal judgment) about a fictional character, i.e. a person that exists in several works of fiction by Raymond Chandler that themselves exist in the real world. In my view there is explicit reference here to Philip Marlowe.¹⁵

To return to our investigation of meanings of (2) in the context described by Figure 1, a further possibility is that S follows up (2) with (17):

(17) In saying *a great architect designed this church*, I (S) meant that Antoni Gaudí designed la Sagrada Família (B).

15. For Bach this is “pseudo-reference”. The fact that there is no reason to make this distinction is attested by the following quotation: “For twenty-three years now I’ve been floating rivers. Always downstream, the easy and natural way. The way Huck Finn and Jim did it, La Salle and Marquette, the mountain men, Major Powell, a few hundred others.” (‘Preliminary Notes’ to *Down the River*, Abbey 1982: 1). The author and reader recognize the reference to Twain’s fictional Huckleberry Finn and Jim in the same manner as they recognize the historical persons of La Salle, Marquette, and Powell.

In (2), the reference to Gaudí and la Sagrada Família is implicit. To be explicit the speaker must utter (18), which is – of course – included as the explanatory clause in (17).

(18) Antoni Gaudí designed la Sagrada Família.

(2) and (18) satisfy different discursive functions and expectations, just as do the names *Hesperus* and *Phosphorus*. Notably, (18) offers no evaluation of Gaudí's prowess as an architect. The relevant facts for (2) and (18) are different: the former refers without naming, the latter names and thereby refers. The referential pragmeme is the same for both (2) and (18) and that is what sanctions identity of reference for the distinct constituents. What S said in (2) is most accurately glossed in (19) (the reasons were given above when discussing (9), (17), and (18)).

(19) In saying *a great architect designed this church*, S meant that a great architect designed the most salient church(-like building) in the foreground of attention.

There is a further possible interpretation of (2): in a third scenario S might explain her utterance (2) (in the context described by Figure 1) by saying (20).

(20) In saying *a great architect designed this church*, I (S) meant that Frank Gehry designed la Sagrada Família (B).

First of all let's assume that "Frank Gehry" is not somehow a mismatch between tongue and brain such that the speaker had in mind Antoni Gaudí but misnamed him. In other words, S believes as she utters (2) that Frank Gehry designed B and that he deserves the accolade "a great architect". This erroneous but intended attribution in no way destroys the comprehensibility of (2) which still has the meaning that I attribute to it in (19). Only additional discourse will reveal S's mistake or perhaps, even though she may recognize her own error, it may never be explicitly corrected.

Let's consider some other quirks of reference. The speaker of (21) refers to a true fact.

(21) President Clinton was a baby in 1946.

In (21) the speaker also refers to the fact of something being a baby (the predication of babyhood) in 1946 and identifies this referent with Bill Clinton, the man who became President of the United States of America. Clearly, this state of babyhood applied to an individual entity vastly different from the one that was 42nd President of the United States from 1993 to 2001. Nonetheless, the two references count as identical in the sense that the

speaker of (21) refers to what language users think of as the same individual at different times in his life. It is well recognized that a referent undergoes changes over time. This is specifically described in Heim 1983; 1988 as updating the file in any two successive references to an entity. For instance:

(22) Catch [₁a chicken₁]. Kill [₂it₂]. Pluck [₃it₃]. Draw [₄it₄]. Cut [₅it₅] up. Marinade [₆it₆]. Roast [₇it₇]. When you've eaten [₈it₈], put [₉the bones₉] in the compost.

The speaker of (22) uses all nine subscripted NPs to refer (by my definition) to the creature identified as a live chicken in “a chicken₁”, a nonspecific member of an unbounded set.¹⁶ By 2 it is dead, by 3 featherless, by 5 dismembered, by 7 roasted, and by 8 eaten. 9 refers to the chicken's bones after the flesh has been stripped from them. Thus 7, for instance, refers not to the chicken in 1, but to the caught, killed, plucked, drawn, cut up, and marinated pieces of that chicken. These successive states of the chicken are presented as changes in the world–time pair spoken of: although the world stays constant throughout (22), each clause corresponds to a temporal change: time₁, time₂, ... time₉. Similarly, London (England) was very different in 1966 from London in 1666, but it was at both times named *London* and its spatial location is partly identical for the two periods. Reference to London on occasions three hundred years apart is normally taken to refer to ‘the same city’ even though language users recognize the differences that time has worked: we specify a temporal index to differentiate the different manifestations of the referent of *London* just as we differentiated President Clinton from the baby known in 1946 as *Billy Blythe* (William Jefferson Blythe III) who adopted the name *Bill Clinton* around 1960. The name changes that occur over time (see (23), where \Rightarrow can be glossed ‘became’ and “ $t_j > t_i$ ” means ‘ t_j succeeds t_i ’) present temporally different manifestations of the referent for which different truths obtain.

(23) Billy Blythe [at t_i] \Rightarrow Bill Clinton [at $t_j > t_i$]

Byzantion [at t_i] \Rightarrow Kōnstantinoupolis [at $t_j > t_i$] \Rightarrow Kostantiniyye [at $t_k > t_j$]
 \Rightarrow İstanbul [at $t_l > t_k$]

¹⁶ Following the lead of Karttunen 1976, Bach 2008: 30 says that such “discourse reference” isn't reference, but he doesn't say what it is instead. Bezuidenhout 2012 might agree with me that this is discourse reference, I'm not sure.

Norma Jeane Mortenson [at t_i] \Rightarrow Norma Jeane Baker [at $t_j > t_i$] \Rightarrow Marilyn
 Monroe [at $t_k > t_j$]

There are other effects too. Compare (24) with (25).

(24) Marilyn Monroe starred in *Some Like it Hot*.

(25) Norma Jeane Baker starred in *Some Like it Hot*.

Although one can reasonably claim that “Marilyn Monroe” and “Norma Jeane Baker” have the same referent, (24) is true but (25) is not true – in the least, it is not true in the same sense that (24) is true. The speaker of (25) errs in not identifying **the appropriate manifestation of the referent** because it uses her baptismal name rather than her stage name. This fact about the appropriate manifestation of the referent is more important because more basic to the understanding of (25) than arguing over whether (25) is merely infelicitous or whether it is also false.

The speaker of (26) refers to Marilyn Monroe, her age (had she lived), a date, and another true fact.

(26) Marilyn Monroe would have been 74 on June 1, 2000.

Although Marilyn Monroe died in 1962 we can imagine a possible world of June 1, 2000 at which she was still alive and, given that she was born June 1, 1926, she would indeed be 74. Reference to things that no longer exist, reference to hypotheticals, reference to fictions, even reference to impossibilities is possible; we have already seen some examples in (11)–(16), and (27) refers to a true fact about an impossible entity.

(27) There is no largest prime number.

Impossible entities are alike to one another in being impossible, but the phrases *largest prime number* and *round square* are, nonetheless, recognisably distinct for the typical speaker of English: in fact their impossibility stems from a proper understanding of their constituent parts whose senses and the intensions conflict, e.g. something which is square cannot concomitantly be round.

If Sue says (28) to Ed, it is perfectly possible for Ed (and us) to understand that two persons are being referred to in such a way as to sufficiently distinguish them in subsequent discourse, even though neither Ed nor we have ever met either of them. Reference does not

necessarily require that a hearer can physically pick out the referent; merely that it can be distinguished from distractors within the context of the particular communication.¹⁷

(28) My husband's having an affair with his boss.

Sue's referent for "my husband" will not be identical with Ed's referent, though **the referent for each of speaker and hearer will count as the same for this given occasion of talk**. Where the audience does not know the persons involved, the principal referent in (28) is the purported fact about Sue's husband's behaviour. Given the cooperative principle, it counts as a truth until disproved. Because it is the purported fact rather than the personae that are significant, it doesn't really matter that the boss turns out to be male rather than female because this additional fact has no bearing at the time of its utterance on the respective references in (28) to Sue's husband and her husband's boss.

Very similar are the references to the tree in (29), where the tree is not in view.

(29) LAYMAN: My elm tree is looking sick.

ARBORIST: Is that *ulmus procera* or *ulmus parvifolia*?

LAYMAN: I have no idea.

Both interlocutors refer to what counts as the same tree, the layman's tree, but they clearly have different conceptions of it. It is in no way infelicitous for the layman to single out this referent even if he has several elm trees on his property; none of the others is relevant to the interchange. It is sufficiently identified for him as the one that he thinks is looking sick. The arborist can make a finer distinction by identifying the subspecies of elm: it is often the case that a referent can be more precisely characterized by one interlocutor – which would, of course, be Sue's situation with respect to her husband in (28).

Hilary Putnam imagined a Twin-Earth that has counterparts to everything on Earth, including English. The sole difference is that Twin-Earth water_T is not H₂O but XYZ, otherwise water_T has all the properties that water_E on Earth has – such as its potability and its being found in lakes (Putnam 1975: 232f). Putnam's question was that when Oscar_E on Earth uses his term *water* and his Twin-Earth counterpart Oscar_T uses his term *water* do they refer

¹⁷ This is comparable with Putnam's example of the layman unable to distinguish an elm from a beech tree yet knowing that *elm* and *beech* denote different species of tree (Putnam 1975).

to the same thing? Putnam concludes that operationally they do but, by definition, the actual substances referred to are distinct. Suppose Oscar_E visits Oscar_T and asks (30).

(30) Can I have a glass of water?

I believe the reference for each of them counts as the same. It is only if a chemical analysis of the referent of *water* is at issue that the difference between water_E and water_T becomes critical. In this regard it should not be forgotten that on Earth (31) may be used of going into the sea, a lake, or a swimming pool and in each of those locations the referent of *water* is differently constituted. The appropriate referent will be contextually determined in accord with common ground.

(31) Can I go into the water, Mum?

At this point I will compare my account of “what counts as reference” with discussions of two-dimensional semantics. Unfortunately there are many differing, even conflicting, accounts of two-dimensional semantics e.g. in García-Carpintero and Macià (eds) 2006. One account that is comparatively appealing to me is that of Chalmers 2006a; b. To illustrate the theory take the two-dimensional account of the water on Earth and XYZ on Twin-Earth.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

All water in the universe could be H₂O, which is the case on Earth, or it could be XYZ, which is the case on Twin-Earth.

We can say that an expression's ‘diagonal intension’ is a function mapping a world *w* to the term's extension when *w* is taken as both actual and counterfactual. (Chalmers 2006b: 577)

We can see in Table 1 the two pairs of diagonals that reflect the situation described: from the Earth perspective actual water is H₂O and it is counterfactual that water is XYZ (shaded cells); from the Twin-Earth perspective the situation is vice versa.

Two-dimensional semantics also seems to work with respect to the matters raised in (24) and (25). The diagonals in Table 2 do identify the different roles of the real world name and the stage name. The situation is comparable with that obtaining between the classical accounts of Phosphorous and Hesperus, both referring to Venus (Chalmers 2006a: 58–61).

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

Two-dimensional semantic theory works well for the Earth vs Twin-Earth scenario where there are different intensions and extensions of $water_E$ and $water_T$ and also for the different intensions of *Norma Jeane Baker* and *Marilyn Monroe* that have the same extension as demonstrated by the diagonals in Table 2. But it does not work for the different conceptions of “my husband” in (28) nor for (32) below because there is no way to get the top row and left column to match. Thus, although a version of two-dimensional semantics touches on some of the problems raised in this paper, it does not offer an account of all of them, and can be left aside.

Interlocutors may have contradictory conceptions of a referent, as in (32), uttered in 2009.

(32) ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY: I will offer proof of the existence of God.

RICHARD DAWKINS: But God does not exist.

For Rowan Williams (the Archbishop) God exists and for the author of *The God Delusion* (Dawkins 2006) God does not; so they have contradictory conceptions of the referent. Nonetheless, the deity that they are both referring to in (32) counts as the same and as overhearers we too understand them to be speaking of what counts as the same referent. The situation is represented in Figure 3. For the Archbishop (A), he, God (G), and Dawkins (D) exist in the same world (depicted as a rectangle); for Dawkins (D), he and A exist in the same world (the ellipse), but G only exists within A’s world (the rectangle). A and D have counterparts in both worlds.

INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE

3. Concluding remarks

In this essay I have defined reference as the speaker’s use of a language expression in the course of talking about its (purported) denotatum to a hearer such that the hearer should recognize what is spoken of sufficiently well for both speaker and hearer to be satisfied that the communication is successful. Referring and the recognition of what has been referred to are pragmatic acts. Thus a *referring expression* is simply a language expression that may be used by a speaker to refer. I have shown that speakers and writers can and do refer explicitly or implicitly to many different types of entity, to particulars (e.g. (1), (12)), to universals, (13), propositions (e.g. (14)), to current or former existents (18), hypotheticals, (11), and nonexistents (14), (27), (32). A referent only needs to ‘count as a referent’ because the nature

of a referent may change over time (e.g. (21)) and because speaker and hearer may hold very different conceptions of the referent in a successful communication – as we saw in (28), (29), (30) and (32). All that is required for a speaker to successfully refer is that the hearer recognizes the referent well enough for the communicative act to be judged successful by both speaker and hearer.¹⁸ Thus we saw in (5) that *this church* only needed to be identified with “the most salient church(-like thing) in the foreground of attention” (B, because of its visual salience). Mistaken reference was mentioned in respect of (5), and although mistaken reference will obviously be unsuccessful more frequently than ‘correct’ reference, it doesn’t cease to be reference on that account. I distinguished explicit reference from implicit reference: *the author of ‘Emma’* explicitly refers to the person who wrote ‘Emma’ (whoever or whatever that entity is) and only implicitly to Jane Austen – a fact determined via encyclopaedic knowledge.¹⁹ In (2) and (5) *this church* explicitly refers to the most salient church(-like thing) in the foreground of attention. The identity between the particular church referred to and la Sagrada Família in (2) or the Great Mosque of Djenné in (5) is determined through encyclopaedic knowledge relevant to the context supplied by Figure 1 and Figure 2 respectively such that reference to la Sagrada Família or to the Great Mosque of Djenné is, consequently, only implicit. In (11), “one of these lovely chocolates” refers implicitly via the proposition in which it occurs to an unspecified member of a bounded set; in (14) the speaker implicitly refers to something that is known not to exist by means of referring explicitly to the fact of its nonexistence. The speaker of (15) questions the possible fact of existence of life on Mars and thereby refers implicitly to life on that planet. The Dawkins denial of the existence of God in (32) is tricky. Arguably he implicitly refers to something whose existence he denies by means of referring explicitly to the purported fact of its nonexistence. Another account applies the kind of explanation given for the infelicity of (25), “Norma Jeane Baker starred in

18. To take a general case: a certain historical figure put to death by the Roman authorities in ancient Palestine is recognized as such in three religions, but the properties attributed to him are different: for Jews, Yeshua was just a preacher not a messiah; for Muslims, Isa was *al-Masīh* the last great prophet before Mohammed but not divine; for Christians, Jesus is Christ the messiah and divine. Nevertheless, it is generally agreed that the names *Yeshua*, *Isa* and *Jesus* are used with the “same” referent intended – albeit with different attributed properties.

19. If there were another lesser-known work entitled ‘Emma’ by Sue Flood, the implicit reference could be to her; but in this circumstance the explicit reference is the same: the speaker refers to the author of ‘Emma’.

Some Like it Hot": in (32) God is manifest in the Archbishop's world wherein it is appropriate for Williams to explicitly refer to God; Dawkins can then implicitly refer to God as something manifest in the Archbishop's world²⁰ (comparable with a film or fictional world) but whose existence Dawkins denies by means of referring explicitly to the purported fact of its nonexistence in his world – which he takes to be the real world. A speaker of (33) refers to Philip Marlowe and while denying his real world existence implicits (see Bach 1994) his existence as a fictional persona.

(33) Raymond Chandler's LA gumshoe Philip Marlowe did not exist in the real world.

Bach 2008: 50 n.2 writes "there is a broad sense in which every expression refers (or at least every expression that has a semantic value that contributes to the propositional content of sentences in which it occurs)" and that would be my position if it is interpreted to mean 'in every expression uttered by a speaker using language normally, the speaker refers'.

Defining the pragmatic act of reference is problematic. A programmatic approach to such a definition includes the following well-known steps.

- a) The speaker S wishes to communicate with hearer H and S has an intention towards referent r. Intentionality is a property of the human mind/brain in virtue of which the mind targets a particular object of thought (see Jaszczolt 1999; Jacob 2003; Siewert 2006; Haugh and Jaszczolt 2012). The intentionality may precede the desire to communicate or vice versa.
- b) S believes that use of the language expression e_r to refer to referent r will enable H to recognize r, that is, distinguish it from potential distracters, normally, with minimum effort.²¹
- c) For r to be recognized by H from e_r , S will presume that H will make recourse to CG_i , that is, the common ground CG assumed to be shared between S and H at a time period beginning t_i , the time of anticipated interpretation. S must surmise what H will take to be in CG_i . In spoken communications CG_i is typically proximal to the time of utterance, but in

20. And the world of like-minded people.

21. I intend clause (b) to encompass the reference to the man in *I saw this weird man that was screaming at passers-by on my way to work*. (Thanks to Sali Mufwene for this example.)

written communications the time span between utterance and interpretation can be unbounded.²²

- d) If S has the inclination and opportunity to be careful s/he will imagine him/herself in H's shoes as H seeks to recognize the referent, and S will label it accordingly. (This is standard procedure for an adroit communicator.)
- e) Particularly in face-to-face interaction, S can rely on H's response (verbal or nonverbal) to indicate whether or not s/he has achieved referential success (this becomes part of the common ground CG_{i+1}) and S may have the opportunity to relabel the reference using an alternative expression to help render the intended reference more amenable to H.

Clauses (b) and (c) are crucial and much has been written on these topics. For illustration consider (34), (35), and (36).

(34) Max shouted at Ed because he'd forgotten to set the alarm.

(35) Max shouted at Ed because he was in a foul mood.

(36) The vet smelled the dog's breath when she bit her.

In (34) and (35) the people referred to must normally be identifiable from common ground and in addition the "he" in (34) will most likely refer to Ed because Ed's failing to set an alarm can have unfortunate consequences which present a possible reason for Max to shout at Ed. It is less likely (but not impossible) that Max is shouting at Ed because Max himself has failed to set the alarm; but this would normally be explicitly marked as in *Max shouted at Ed although it was he himself who had forgotten to set the alarm*. In (35) "he" most likely refers to Max, because shouting at someone is evidence of being in a bad mood. Had Ed been in a foul mood, the cooperative speaker should have said something like *Max shouted at Ed for being in a foul mood*. In (36) it would be usual for "the vet" and "the dog" to be identifiable from common ground, and then knowledge of animal~human behaviour (also a part of common ground) will identify the biter as the dog. Reporting an unusual event such as the vet biting the dog would normally demand explicit marking of agency as in *When the vet went to bite the dog she smelled its breath*.

We have seen that what counts as the referent in a successful act of communication may differ for speaker and hearer. Indeed it may differ for just the speaker if s/he is referring to

22. There is some similarity here with the conclusions in Zielinska 2007: 828f.

different manifestations of a referent in different locations as in (30) and (31), or that have undergone mutative processes through the passage of time as exemplified in (21), or as the consequence of a series of predications as in (22). Speakers of (24) and (25) refer to different manifestations of a woman under her baptismal name and her stage name (which may constitute different legal entities). The manifestation of this same woman referred to in the counterfactual world described in (26) is yet again different. I conclude that to successfully perform a pragmatic act of reference requires astute assessment of the common ground and percipient choice of the language expression that will best point the hearer to the intended manifestation of the reference in those circumstances. Physical identification is not necessary, a hearer only needs to have a cogent grasp of what differentiates the speaker's (presumed) referent from any distractors.

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Figures

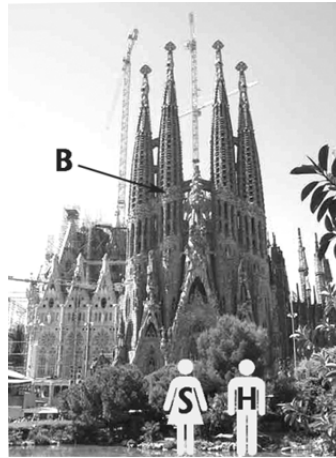


Figure 1. S utters (2) to H as they stand before B

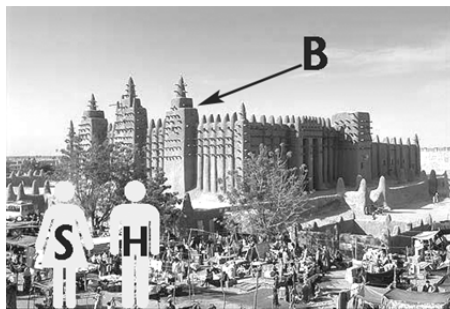


Figure 2. H utters (5) to S as they stand before B

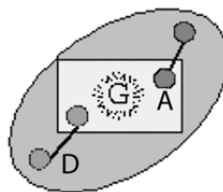


Figure 3. D is Dawkins, A the Archbishop, G is God. Dawkins' world is the ellipse; the Archbishop's world is the rectangle.

TABLES

Table 1

	Earth	Twin-Earth
Earth water _E	H ₂ O	H ₂ O
Twin-Earth water _T	XYZ	XYZ

Table 2

	Real world	Film world
Real world	Norma Jeane	Norma Jeane
Film world	Marilyn	Marilyn