
Deferred vs. descriptive. The case of proper names and indexicals

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Indexicals and proper names are usually considered as devices of direct reference. However, from Nunberg (1993) on, the so-called descriptive uses of indexicals are generally acknowledged, whilst in their descriptive uses, indexicals contribute to the expression of general propositions. I suggest that we should distinguish between deferred and descriptive uses of singular expressions or between two cases of deferred reference as proposed by Nunberg. I will reserve the term “deferred reference” for the cases when the term’s propositional contribution is singular and call “descriptive” the cases of general propositional contribution of a term. I will present examples of both kind of uses for indexicals as well as for proper names and propose an extension of the original notion of deferred reference to the analysis of deferred uses of proper names. I will show, however, that contrary to prevailing assumption that the propositional contribution of all descriptively used singular terms is a singular concept, a comprehensive analysis of descriptive uses of singular terms requires non-singular contributions as well. I will propose a mechanism which I dubbed descriptive anaphora for the analysis of descriptive uses of both indexicals and proper names. This will allow for a uniform treatment of examples calling for singularity and those for which the assumption of singularity built into the interpretive concept itself does not give adequate interpretations. While (strictly) deferred uses of proper names are rare, I will suggest how most non-referential uses of proper names provided in the literature, i.e. Family, Costume, Resemblance, Artwork and Machiavelli Examples (Böer 1975; Jeshion 2015, Fara 2015) are analyzable by the proposed mechanism of descriptive anaphora. This will point to their systematic character.

References: • Böer S (1975) Proper Names as Predicates. *Philoso Stud* 27, 389–400. • Fara D (2015) Names are predicates, *Philos Rev* 124, 59-117. • Jeshion R (2015) Referentialism and Predicativism About Proper Names. *Erkenntnis* 80, 363–404. • Nunberg G (1993) Indexicality and deixis. *Linguist Philos* 16, 1–43.