

Reference under Perspective

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It is generally admitted that natural language semantics requires some degree of context-sensitivity. Indeed, a number of referential puzzles (e.g. failure of substitutivity of coreferential proper names or indexicals in propositional attitude or modal contexts) have led philosophers of language (Kaplan and Stalnaker among the first) to the conclusion that an adequate semantic theory of proper names, indexicals, and demonstratives, must also account for the systematic dependence of their semantic content on the context of interpretation. But in the last decade, the assumption that such context-sensitivity affects only a small class of terms, has been widely questioned. A number of defenders of a purely pragmatic conception of language (Travis[1997], Recanati[2004], among others) argued that even sentences containing common nouns, which are classically considered as context-insensitive, can only be associated with contextual truth-values.

In this session, I will argue that:

1. The context-sensitivity of nominal expressions involves some kind of reference under perspective. I will present a number of theories, developed in cognitive linguistics, that make use of perspectival reference to account for nominal polysemy: the theory of facets (Crues[1986]), lexical conceptual paradigm (Pustejovsky[1988,1993]), active zones theory (Langacker[1984]), the theory of integrated metonymy (Kleiber[1999]).
2. I will present a number of semantic theories that have been developed on the basis of similar intuitions: Landman's theory of partial objects(Landman[1986,1989]), Fine's theory of qua-objects(Fine[1982]), and Bartsch's theory of properties under perspectives(Bartsch[1986]).
3. I will conclude by sketching a way of accounting for the notion of reference under perspective in the two-dimensional framework developed by Stalnaker[1999], thus providing a unified account of the semantic content of proper names, indexicals, demonstratives and nominal expressions.

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