

Introduction : the functions of language

Language may perform a variety of functions. We employ it to make statements, ask questions, express our emotions, order someone else around, etc. No serious objection can be levied against the view that language performs functions. However, a number of objections can be raised against specific proposals as to what functions language performs, how many, how they should be distinguished, which is the basic one and other proposals of a similar concrete nature. Also, disagreement is fierce over the nature of the relationship between language functions and linguistic form and structure, over the question as to whether an investigation of linguistic structure should take account of language functions, or, if it should, to what degree.

If we have a plank that we, for some reason or other, wish to hammer a nail into, we look around for a hammer. Failing to find one, we look for a suitable stone, an axe, even the leather heel of a shoe. We do not look for a feather, a handful of soil, not even for another plank, for we know that these would all be unsuited to the task of getting the nail in the plank. In our choice of tool we rely on our knowledge of the properties of things; those will do, these will not do for the job in hand. There is an important relationship between the structural properties of things and the functions that we wish these things to perform. So too, with language. If we want to enquire into the structural properties of language we must take heed of the functions that language may perform.

The first serious discussion of language functions is that by Bühler (1918; 1934: 24ff), although he credits Plato with the original insight of language as an *organum*. Bühler's 'organon-model' is the linguistic correlate of Martin Buber's virtually contemporary philosophical model of religious experience, based as it is on *Ich* (the speaker), *Du* (the hearer), and *Es* (the thing). Seen in relation to these three factors, the linguistic sign – which to Bühler is explicitly 'concrete phenomena of sound' – is, respectively a *symbol*, a *symptom*, and a *signal*. Each of the

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10571-2 - Referential-Semantic Analysis: Aspects of a Theory of Linguistic Reference

Torben Thrane

Excerpt

[More information](#)

2 Introduction : the functions of language

three relations that the sign may contract corresponds to a separate linguistic function. The relation between speaker and sign corresponds to the expressive (*Ausdruck*) function of language, that between hearer and sign to the stimulative (*Appell*) function, and that between thing and sign to the descriptive (*Darstellung*) function.

He does not query the priority of the descriptive function, but he does argue that independent status can be given to the other two, conceding, however, that no sharp lines of demarcation can be drawn between the three functions. For reasons that will become abundantly clear I am in general sympathy with the view that priority should be accorded the descriptive function. In order further to substantiate this view, I should like to point to the fact that it is the only function on which there is substantial agreement among a number of scholars who have all dealt specifically with the problem of the functions of language:

(1)	Bühler	Lyons	Halliday	Jakobson	Popper
	<i>Ausdruck</i>	expressive	inter-	emotive	expressive
	–	social	personal	phatic	–
	<i>Appell</i>	–		conative	stimulative
	<i>Darstellung</i>	descriptive	ideational	referential	descriptive
	–	–	textual	–	–
	–	–	–	metalingual	–
	–	–	–	poetic	–
	–	–	–	–	argumentative

Lyons (1977: 50ff) gives a comprehensive account of Bühler's, Halliday's, and Jakobson's functions, but for his own purposes he adopts the three ascribed to him above. This is not to say, of course, that these are the only functions of language recognized by Lyons, but they are presumably those that he takes to be the most important.

As far as can be gleaned from his article, Halliday (1970) collapses Bühler's *Ausdruck* and *Appell*, further expanding this composite function to be defined as the function whereby 'language serves to establish and maintain social relations' (Halliday 1970: 143). The textual function is supposedly the function whereby we are able to construct and understand coherent stretches of speech. Insofar as this can be properly described as one of the functions of language, I suspect

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10571-2 - Referential-Semantic Analysis: Aspects of a Theory of Linguistic Reference

Torben Thrane

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction : the functions of language* 3

that it correlates, to some extent at least, with Popper's argumentative function (see below).

The largest number of functions is offered by Roman Jakobson (1960), and he, like Bühler, has a principled basis for them, namely, the six necessary and sufficient components of a comprehensive utterance situation. These are, in the order comparable to the equivalent functions listed in (1)¹ under Jakobson, the addresser, the contact, the addressee, the context, the code, and the message. The basis of the functions is explained in terms of orientation. When an utterance is primarily orientated towards the code – i.e. the language in which discourse is held at the moment – then the utterance is an instance of a predominantly metalingual function, to take just one example. Like Bühler, Jakobson is careful not to regard the functional classification of particular utterances as an all-or-nothing affair.

Popper (1963: 134f, 295) follows Bühler for three of his four functions, but in addition he proposes what he calls an argumentative function. As the name implies, this is the function of language which enables us to construct valid arguments. Insofar as this function is characterized morphologically, I take it to subsume Halliday's textual function.

It could perhaps be argued that there is no argumentative function. Popper might be held to have perversely confused the semantic structure of language, which is the linguistic reality that permits *us* to draw inferences from one set of sentences to another along lines which are defined by the temporal linearity of speech, with unnecessary and damaging considerations of what language 'does'. But surely such an argument is confused. Language is a tool. *We* employ it, for a variety of purposes, and it is the nature of these purposes we are investigating at present. One of these purposes is, clearly, to convince our interlocutor, to leave him no alternative but to accept what we say. When we engage in an act of convincing by uttering a sequence of semantically inter-related sentences, then we employ language in a predominantly argumentative function.

Popper's account is interesting for yet another reason. He explicitly states that the functions are ordered hierarchically (in the order given

¹ Arabic numerals in parentheses refer to 'chapter-internal' examples. Thus (1) here refers to example (1) in the Introduction. Reference to 'chapter-external' examples will be given by the number of the relevant example preceded by the number of the chapter; thus (5:30) refers to example (30) in chapter 5.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10571-2 - Referential-Semantic Analysis: Aspects of a Theory of Linguistic Reference

Torben Thrane

Excerpt

[More information](#)

4 *Introduction : the functions of language*

under Popper in (1)). An utterance may be expressive without being argumentative, or, in general, an utterance may be used to perform a function of any level without performing the functions at lower levels, but not vice versa. He sees in this hierarchical order a means of characterizing human language as against other, e.g. animal, semiotic systems. The two lowest functions, the descriptive and the argumentative, are peculiar to human language. Reflecting on the relationship between these two functions and various types of meaning, we note that the descriptive function correlates with referential (denotative, descriptive) meaning, whereas the argumentative function correlates with meaning conceived of as a set of sense-relations, or sense in Lyons' terms. The connection between these two types of meaning shall occupy us at a later stage (cf. §2.0). Suffice it here to say that they complement each other, in that they represent two different viewpoints of the same phenomenon.

It is the main purpose of the present work to enquire into various aspects of what I shall call, following Jakobson, the referential function of language. As I hold the view that language structure and language function are inter-related, particular investigations will be undertaken of ways and means of acquiring insight into linguistic structure by way of considerations of language functions. Before we can go on to these matters, however, one or two pertinent contemporary assumptions need attention.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10571-2 - Referential-Semantic Analysis: Aspects of a Theory of Linguistic Reference

Torben Thrane

Excerpt

[More information](#)

PART I: THE PRELIMINARIES

For, what is worse, knowledge is made by oblivion; and to purchase a clear and warrantable body of Truth, we must forget and part with much we know.

SIR THOMAS BROWNE *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*

1 *The linguistic preliminaries*

1.1 Pronominalization

Among the clearly defined areas of contemporary linguistic research, that of pronominalization is the only one to subsume matters of reference in any consistent way.

There are two fundamental aspects involved in the linguistic analysis of pronouns. Although they are interrelated they call for a distinction which is not always clearly drawn. One aspect is concerned with the internal analysis of pronouns; another is concerned with the function of the pronouns in linguistic utterances. Moreover, it is not immediately obvious what the relationship between these two aspects is in inferential terms: can the internal make-up of pronouns be inferred from a consideration of the functions they (may) perform, or is the range of functions performed by a given pronoun dependent in some way upon its internal make-up? In the present section I shall enquire into these questions on the basis of a number of more-or-less recent treatments of the pronoun in the linguistic literature.

It would appear to be the case that within each aspect three different views are in contention. Thus within the functional aspect we can distinguish (I) 'co-reference', (II) 'substitution', and (III) 'indication'; and within the aspect of internal composition, (A) their composition as NP, (B) as non-derived, and (C) as involving syncretism/segmentalization. These may not be absolutely clear-cut distinctions, particularly with respect to (A) and (C), and they may not cover the whole field of pronominalization. Yet if we simplify the issue somewhat and regard the personal pronouns as constituting the paradigm instances of pronominalization on the basis of which the distinctions are drawn, they at least are not misleading. Table 1 shows how a number of studies pertaining to pronouns and pronominalization reflect these distinctions.

The position AI, I suppose, is what could be called the classical transformational position, most ably defended by Karttunen (1971)

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10571-2 - Referential-Semantic Analysis: Aspects of a Theory of Linguistic Reference

Torben Thrane

Excerpt

[More information](#)8 *The linguistic preliminaries*

Table 1

	I	II	III
A	Lees & Klima (1963) Karttunen (1971) Kuroda (1971)	Lakoff (1968a)	
B	Jackendoff (1972) McCawley (1971)	Crymes (1968) Harweg (1968) Bloomfield (1933)	Collinson (1937)
C	Postal (1966) Sommerstein (1972)	Hjelmslev (1937)	

against the rival position BI, the two holders of which differ among themselves in matters which need not concern us at present.

What is of immediate interest about the classical position (AI) is that it is reached from the point of view of the functional aspect. Since (personal) pronouns may be used instead of a 'full' NP, the implication drawn is that the internal structure of a (personal) pronoun can be assessed on the basis of the internal structure of NPs. This inference relies on what since Chomsky (1965: 145ff) has been known as the referential index convention: deep structure NPs are assigned a referential index of some form.

However, a further requirement is imposed on pronominalization. Not only should the referential indices on two (or more) NPs be identical for pronominalization to occur, the NPs should also be lexically identical. If both conditions are met we have what Chomsky (1965: 196) calls 'strictly identical Nouns'. Pronominalization is held to depend on strict identity in this sense.

On the assumption that 'co-reference' has something to do with the notion of reference as this has been developed by linguists and philosophers since Strawson (1950), the requirement of lexical identity is strange. Not only does it contravene the basic principle of reference, namely, that a great variety of linguistic forms may be used to refer to the same entity *salva veritate* (cf. also Sampson 1969: 18), it also creates problems for the analysis of 'co-referential epithets' in which the noun is not the same as the noun in the antecedent NP. This point is mentioned by Jackendoff (1972: 110), and it constitutes one of the major reasons for

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10571-2 - Referential-Semantic Analysis: Aspects of a Theory of Linguistic Reference

Torben Thrane

Excerpt

[More information](#)

1.1 Pronominalization 9

Lakoff's abandonment of the referential index approach (cf. G. Lakoff 1968a: 16ff; also 1968b). Jackendoff and Lakoff thus seek to establish TG-parallels to Harweg (1968) in which this principle is of crucial importance. Consequently, both lay themselves open to criticisms of arbitrarily delimiting the domain of grammatical description to the sentence (cf. Delisle 1973), since such a view in order to be consistent must acknowledge that it is essentially the same processes that operate across sentence boundaries as within.

The referential index convention itself, i.e. divorced from the condition of lexical identity, is the formulation of the assumption that the internal structure of proforms can be assessed on the basis of the internal structure of NPs. Yet here, too, there are difficulties. It is, for example, not always clear which determiner is involved in (one or both of) the two NPs between which relativization is supposed to hold. Cf. in this connection Kuroda (1971: 184 fn 6) where this point is dismissed as not constituting a 'serious drawback' for the argument advanced (in support of Karttunen (1971)), because the apparent violation of the constraint on backwards pronominalization (disallowed when two indefinite NPs are involved) is avoided since 'eventually [the trigger of backwards pronominalization] is replaced by a relative pronoun, *which one can reasonably assume to be definite*' (my emphasis). In other words, a deep structurally indefinite NP is 'replaced' by something which is assumed to be definite. Moreover, it is not even clear that this 'replacement' can occur since, presumably, it presupposes the application of a process which, however, is blocked by the presence of two indefiniteness markers.

Disregarding such difficulties, the classical position rests on the assumption – not always fulfilled, cf. Partee (1970: 370) – that there is a relation (of reference) between words and things, to put it informally and somewhat simplistically. If this relation holds between two words (in the same sentence) and only one thing, then a secondary, parasitic relation (of co-reference) is said to hold between the two words.

In order to be able to state these matters in a slightly more sophisticated manner, let us establish a distinction between entities of various levels. We shall say that an entity of level zero is a non-linguistic entity (a thing, a person, a thought, an emotion, etc.), and that an entity of level one is a linguistic entity (a word, a sentence, a NP, a VP, etc.). See Sørensen (1958: 17ff) for a more detailed discussion of the notion of 'level' in this connection, including an expansion of this simple, basic

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10571-2 - Referential-Semantic Analysis: Aspects of a Theory of Linguistic Reference

Torben Thrane

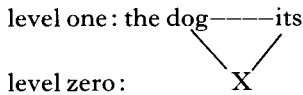
Excerpt

[More information](#)10 *The linguistic preliminaries*

scheme to cover a level 2 (a metalinguistic level), and a discussion of the possibilities for restricting the number of ‘metalevels’.¹ Dependent on this distinction we shall say that an *inter*-level relation is a relation holding between entities of different levels, whereas an *intra*-level relation holds between entities of the same level.

With these points in mind we can now reformulate the classical position. In order to account for pronominalization, advocates of position AI assume the existence of an inter-level relation (of reference). If two entities of level one contract an inter-level relation with the same entity of level zero, then an intra-level relation (of co-reference) is inferred between the two level one entities in question. Schematically the situation is as follows:

- (1) the dog chased its tail



Investigation into co-reference is to be conducted within the syntactical and/or the semantical framework. Therefore the inferred (intra-) relation is promoted to primary status, and the inter-relations are left for philosophers and logicians to explore.

In contrast, the advocates of position B – and particularly of BII – are engaged in describing a ‘purely’ linguistic relationship. The diagram which reflects this position is:

- (2) level one: the dog
- ²
- _____ its

Substitution is an intra-level relation which holds between entities of

¹ The relevant problems of *suppositio materialis* (or *hypostasis*), among which is the prominent notion of ‘reflexive’ reference, will not be gone into here. As for my views on these matters they tally with the conclusions reached by Jakobsen (1977), one of which is that hypostasis-forms are material objects *without* meaning (in fact belong to the object level). Adopting this view we can restrict our attention to just the two levels mentioned above without needing to postulate the existence of an infinite number of metalevels. At the same time it is not altogether an uncontroversial view.

² This is not quite correct as far as Harweg is concerned. To him *the dog* would be a pronoun, or a two-dimensional syntagmatic substituents. Substitution holds between *a dog* and *the dog* in precisely the same manner as between *a dog* and *its*. This imprecision does not affect the point being made, however.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10571-2 - Referential-Semantic Analysis: Aspects of a Theory of Linguistic Reference

Torben Thrane

Excerpt

[More information](#)1.1 *Pronominalization* 11

level one, and no consideration is given to what possible inter-level relations entities of level one may contract. Such a view is in many ways attractive, and the results it gives rise to are both powerful and interesting. Yet it fails to account exhaustively for many aspects of pronominal usage. To mention but one point, it cannot account for first and second person personal pronouns. If we want to give an account of the functions of pronouns we must take note of the inter-level relations contracted by them.

This, precisely, is what Collinson does in his largely neglected study of ‘indicators’ in various languages. Collinson’s starting-point is notional, and his aim is to describe the semantic field of *indication*. This latter term is explained as the notional content of those linguistic items that either ‘point’ to entities (occurents) or ‘mark’ them as foci of continued interest for the benefit of the listener. Under this approach a number of traditionally rather disparate items are brought together (articles, pronouns, case-, tense-, and aspect-markers, prepositions, adverbials of certain semantic types, and an assortment of isolated phrases and constructions). The work is, in fact, an early attempt to explicate (what is now called) deixis from a semantic point of view, and it contains a number of shrewd and original observations. However, it does not attempt to explicate the relationship between pronominal function and internal composition. Furthermore, although the basic notion is ‘indication’ (i.e. in my terms (one of) the relation(s) between entities of levels one and zero), it in fact foreshadows the classical TG-position AI with respect to third person personal pronouns. These are seen as primarily anaphoric. My reason for classifying Collinson’s work as a work of type III is then that the anaphoric relation itself is conceived of as a specific kind of indication, namely, *indication within a context, or referential indication* (title of Collinson’s chapter 3).

Apart from the complexities arising from failure to distinguish the two aspects of pronominal analysis alluded to above, matters are further complicated by consideration of what might at first sight appear to be yet a third aspect, the syntactic *process* of pronominalization. Langacker (1966) and Postal (1971) seek to pinpoint the *conditions* under which pronominalization occurs or does not occur. Though seemingly of a quite fundamental syntactic nature, such investigations presuppose acceptance of a particular view on the relationship between antecedent and pronoun, in both instances the notion of co-reference (see especially Postal 1971: 8 fn 8). But since the intricacies of co-reference as such