

Proper Names as Triggers of Narratives

Alexei Cherniak

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Peoples' Friendship University of Russia

Moscow, Russia

E-mail: abishot2100@yandex.ru

Abstract—What are meanings of proper names? The most popular understanding of the semantics of these expressions identifies their meanings with entities which they denote. But a name may denote nothing and nevertheless have meaning. There is a tendency in modern semantics to distinguish between denotations — things in the world which names denote, — and abstract entities which are elements of the discourses where the names are used, which those names introduce — so called discourse referents. An essential feature of these referents is that they are determined by discourses — finite sequences of utterances. From the point of view of authors of this approach definite expression like proper name always introduces something known from the previous discourse, whereas indefinite expressions introduces new content. But a definite expression may be not involved in some anaphoric relation with some other expression used in the discourse from which it could borrow its reference. In this case it is important to explain how proper name may introduce something known into a discourse. The author argues that in such cases the meanings of proper names are determined not by discourses where they are used, but by more complex sets of sentences involved in different discourses, which may be called narratives. He claims that in certain cases proper names are triggers of certain narratives which determine elements which they introduce into discourses and which may be called interdiscursive referents.

Keywords—discourse; reference; denotation; proper name; discourse referent; file card; narrative

I. INTRODUCTION

People in communication produce statements which concatenate in more complex unities named discourses. Proper names and definite descriptions play an important role in communication: they help to understand what discourse is about. Standard semantics of proper names identifies their main contributions to discourses with their denotations which are normally understood as singular objects, individuals, places, states, events and other fragments of the world the users of the names live in. Thus we suppose that "Trump" refers to particular man and "Moscow" to particular city. There are other names, such as "Pegasus"; the status of their references is unclear: there is no real object which this name may refer to, but still we may think that it has some reference (perhaps to certain idea or mental representation). May be some names are really empty ("Abracadabra", e.g.), i.e. have no reference at all, but most

of them seem to refer to something: if not to real thing, then to some fictional, abstract or mental entity.

There is a semantic theory which allows proper names to contribute referents to discourses even if they don't have bearers; it is known as discourse semantics.¹ It provides a popular explanation of the dynamics of understanding and construction of discourses from linguistic elements. In particular, it suggests an alternative to the standard semantics of proper names rooted in the works of Mill [14], Frege [1] and Russell [16], semantics where names have references connecting them with real objects, and senses connecting them with human ideas. In discourse semantics two types of denotations are assigned to proper names and other so called singular terms. These two types of denotations correspond to two levels of interaction of agents with a discourse. One level is the level of understanding of what was already said, another one is the level of evaluation, in particular, of judgments about truth or falsity of a discourse as it is represented on the first level. Understanding deals with mental constructions and contributions of proper names on that level are so called discourse referents or, in other terminology, "file cards".² Thus, in "Peter is smoking" (1) "Peter" introduces a discourse referent x which is just something the rest of the phrase is about: two further conditions ("x is named Peter" and "x is smoking") "fill the file card" with the information about that referent. If the next phrase in a row is "He cannot help himself" it would be most likely interpreted as saying about the same referent which was already introduced: this means that the condition "x cannot help himself" should be added to those which are already in the card. When evaluation takes place discourse references become substituted with corresponding fragments of reality or the world relative to which the discourse has to be evaluated. Thus, x must be substituted by a particular individual who satisfies all conditions listed in the discourse.

According to I. Heim, one of the main proponents of this approach, indefinite noun phrases introduce new discourse referents whereas definite noun phrases, which include proper names, modify file cards which already exist by adding new information in them [4]. This functional distinction in general reflects an old intuition that when we

¹ Main versions of this semantics are contained in [7], [6], [3], [15].

² The term discourse referent was introduced by L. Karttunen [10]. The term "file card" uses I. Heim [4].

use definite term we deal with something known, but by using indefinite terms we become acquainted with something new. It is claimed that discourse semantics better forecast the behavior of indefinite as well as definite noun phrases (especially their use in anaphors) than its contenders [5]. That's why it is popular.

But what can a proper name or another definite noun phrase modify when it is used in the discourse for the first time and no definite or indefinite already used in it had introduced its discourse referent? Should it count as modifying some empty file antecedent to the discourse? But this is just the same as to introduce new discourse referent, i.e. to behave like indefinite noun phrase. In this article I will try to show that even in such cases semantic contributions of proper names and analogous expressions may be determined by what was already said in the course of preceding communication.

II. PROPER NAMES AS EXTERNAL ANCHORS

The most popular explanation of semantic contributions of proper names into discourses identifies them with denotations or referents of these names.³ From this point of view when we use proper name we already know what its denotation is, what part of the world is its bearer. But the speaker may know just some information about the names reference given to him through some descriptive content associated with this name. This information may be (and usually is) insufficient for an identification of the denotation of the name. Thus, "Big Ben" contains some descriptive information but it only helps to understand that the denotation of that name is something which is called "Ben" and is big. "Peter" has no descriptive content, but still some metalinguistic information may be read from it: that it is something called Peter. But many things may be called Peter. Most of proper names we use are ambiguous; they have different bearers only one of which we normally try to refer to in particular communicative situation by use of certain name. How then a name may contribute into a discourse a referent bound to a particular object and nothing else?

The most prominent answer to this problem gives another famous proponent of discourse semantics, H. Kamp. He utilizes so called theory of direct reference according to which references of proper names don't depend on their senses, and these terms refer to their bearers directly.⁴ According to Kamp semantics of proper names used in discourses may be explained by their having "external anchors", functions which map discourse referents onto real objects. In terms of discourse representative theory (DRT) designed by Kamp it is depicted as $\{<x, a>\}$, where x is discourse referent, and a stands for an object chosen from the world of a statement part of which the interpreted proper name is. Therefore the file or discourse-representative scheme (DRS), in Kamp's terms, with an anchor for at least

one discourse referent in it may be satisfied only by those states of affairs which are consistent with the correspondent anchor [8]. But what is the status of such anchor? Is it part of mental representation of a discourse or is it some medium between DRS and reality? If it is part of representation (DRS) which follows from the standard depiction of its contribution into interpretation by Kamp,⁵ then it is not clear how DRS may be a depiction of a mental representation of a discourse and at the same time include elements of the reality itself. If anchor is part of DRS, then a must stand not for certain real object but for a symbol representing it in the DRS, and its denotation must be a mental representation of the corresponding object. If we assign it direct reference, then according to the account in question it must be also connected with some object by an anchor, etc. ad infinitum. But if we treat an anchor as some addition to DRS then it must report some additional information about an object bound by this anchor which is absent from corresponding DRS, and this information must be such that it must allow different participants of communication to single out this object in the world of a discourse. Then why not just represent this function as some additional element of DRS?⁶

In (2) the contribution of the name "Zebedea" in discourse is reduced to an introduction of a discourse referent bound by anchor only. The name itself does not participate in interpretation according to this way of its representation. It is done in order to eliminate the impression that the name's semantic contribution depends somehow on the descriptive content associated with it (even if only metalinguistical which always can be assigned to a name). But is this reduction correct? For it may be not indifferent for the speaker by what name certain individual is named. If I use "Cicero" and "Tully" as synonyms the thought expressed by "Cicero was a good writer" shouldn't change after the substitution of "Tully" instead of "Cicero", since both according to the concept contribute to the discourse with the same individual, say b . But my addressee may not consider "Cicero" and "Tully" as synonyms, and therefore she wouldn't understand my statement as saying about b that he was a good writer. Anticipating this I may count important to introduce b as Cicero, and not as Tully.

Besides, although intuitively it may be clear how an anchor may guide an interpretation of a name if there is at least one appropriate object in the immediate environment of the speaker onto which the discourse referent of the name may be mapped, it is not clear how an anchor may guide an interpretation of a name if there is no appropriate object in the speaker's immediate environment. How can we understand directly referential standard uses of such names as "Cicero" or "Aristotle"? No one may be the bearer of such name in the world as it is given to us now.

³ See, for example, Mill's claim that denotation of a proper name is its only contribution into discourse [14].

⁴ The foundations of this theory were formulated by J.S. Mill [14]. Contemporary versions of this theory are developed in such works as [11] and [9]. The main postulates of Kamp's theory see in [7].

⁵ Cr. his representation of the DRS with an anchor for the statement "Zebedea loves the stockbroker": $[x, y: \{<x, a>\}, \text{stockbroker}(y), \text{loves}(x, y)]$ (2).

⁶ For more detailed criticism of the indefinite status of external anchors see [12].

III. PROPER NAMES AS TRIGGERS OF PRESUPPOSITIONS

One solution to the later problem is to treat proper names and other definite terms used for the first time in a discourse and having no anaphoric antecedents in it as terms which introduce something unknown but definable by the context. In this case it is recognized that a discourse is always preceded by some non-empty "file" containing information about the context of the discourse, and that certain definite expressions introduce referents determined by corresponding elements of this context. Then the use of a definite expression in such case may count as anaphoric where the term is connected by the relation of coreferentiality with some element of the discourse's presupposition which contains an information about its context, the information which is normally only presupposed in the discourse [18], [13]. Proper names then are seen as triggers of such presuppositions, i.e. terms which tokens refer to the information presupposed in what is said. In this case it is proposed to accept that on the basis of such information, which is, so to say, an input of the discourse, the participants of that discourse form some preliminary representation of what is the subject of the future talk, which is structurally analogous to mental representations of semantic contribution of standard elements of a discourse (hence may be represented as DRS). It may be supposed that when someone says (1), and someone else hears this phrase they both already have some preliminary common representation of the situation they are part of, and in this situation there is only one individual satisfying the conditions listed in the discourse file. Then it may be supposed that this use of the name "Peter" and its future uses in the same discourse would apply to this individual and no one else.

But what if the context does not contain an appropriate object? If someone says that one her fellow has met today a Chinese princess, this statement would presuppose that there is a Chinese princess in the world of the statement. But since there is nothing of the kind in the immediate environment of the speaker (and the interpreter as well) the existence of such object must be accommodated according to the theory: we must just accept that certain individual exists [2]. Certainly the further processing of the information reported in the discourse may motivate the rejection of some presuppositions: thus if the interpreter is sure that there is no Chinese princess she would reject the corresponding presupposition. Anyway it is proposed to see such cases as producing new discourse referents.

But what will say the phrase, e.g., "Yesterday I was reading Cicero"?⁷ Let's suppose that the name "Cicero" is known to the interpreter of this statement: in this case we cannot say that it introduces something unknown; but in the same time there is nothing appropriate in the context of the statement, nothing that could substitute the discourse referent of the name in question.

IV. PROPER NAMES AS TRIGGERS OF NARRATIVES

I think that in many cases definite expressions really introduce something already known, but determined neither by the current discourse not by its context. The meaning of a name "Cicero" is known to standard users of this name because they dealt with it in the past, they participated in series of past discourses one of which subjects was Cicero. It may be said that corresponding discourse referent is already introduced and exist in a number of past discourses; because of this those who are acquainted with some of these discourses introduce the existing discourse referent when they speak about Cicero by using the name "Cicero". They don't create new discourse referent. It seems even appropriate to speak that in such cases an interdiscursive referent is introduced (for in most cases that which is thus introduced exist as part of more than one past discourse). Two levels of information are connected with the use of such names in such contexts: an information which is contained in that use and which may be immediately read from it (that which it reports and that which it presupposes),⁸ and an information which is needed for its complete understanding the source of which is another discourse or set of discourses. The set of discourses (sometimes consisting from one element) needed for a complete understanding of a definite expression may be called a narrative of that expression. The first use of a definite term in the discourse if it is known either to the speaker or to the interpreter may then be considered as an activation of a definite narrative; and a proper name used in such circumstances may count, respectively, as a trigger of a narrative.

As a matter of fact something analogous may happen when someone uses a name which is unknown to an interpreter (or even to herself). Suppose, I bought the movie and read its title: "The book of Henry". Since I know that the word "Henry" is normally used as a proper name I understand that the part of a subject of a talk is some individual who owns certain book; but there is no one in my environment who could be that individual, and hence there is no appropriate book. Certainly I may suppose that there is corresponding Henry in the world, but, first, I cannot be sure that the title refers to real person, and, second, unlike "Chinese princes" "Henry" tells me almost nothing about conditions an individual in question should satisfy (it may be even not true that "Henry" is his right name). Everything becomes clear when I see the movie or become acquainted with its content some other way: from it I learn who Henry is and what book is meant. But even before I saw the movie I can understand that the definite term "the book of Henry" introduces something which certain movie is about. This subject is not known by me yet, but it already exists in my environment, as part of certain movie which by containing a structured series of statements with an internal logic represents certain narrative. Therefore even in his case it rather an existing interdiscursive referent is introduced than a new discourse referent is created. When I understand that "the book of Henry" introduces a discourse referent about

⁷ Of course the first step of interpretation in this case will be the reading of "Cicero" as "Cicero's book".

⁸ For instance, that it is a name of a particular individual (reported), and that certain individual is the bearer of this name (presupposed).

which I could learn something only by watching the movie or getting myself acquainted otherwise with its content, I understand which other information I must attract in order to understand what the title in question is about. This way I make this information actual and the corresponding narrative (the structured and logically organized linguistic part or representation of the movie) becomes for me the source of the meaning of the interpreted expression. Thus I create an interdiscursive anaphor. That's why I think that in general it would be right to say that even an unknown name as a trigger of a narrative not only refer to it but in a sense introduce some of its elements in the current discourse.

Speaking, for instance, about Cicero that he was a good writer I may know very little about Cicero. It may be said that I speak about something which I only partly acquainted with. But since this information doesn't allow me to single out Cicero it may also be said that I am not acquainted with Cicero. If all the contribution of a name into discourse must be determined by that discourse, perhaps together with its context, then non-anaphoric use of a name of something unknown or only partly known would be like the use of an indefinite expression which introduces new discourse referent. But this contradicts to the plausible intuition that in such cases we deal with something known.

The narrative of a term may also be seen as "a file", but such that rather unites a set of discourses than represents the content of some one of them. Many people in the past talk about Cicero creating "files" with identical or similar information; they produced that which may be called a narrative of Cicero or simply a set of stories about the same person. Historical Cicero as something which is common to all these discourses is not then a discourse but rather an interdiscursive referent. And an introduction of such referent presupposes that a semantic contribution of a term which introduces it is determined rather by one of this term's narratives than by its content (what it says and presupposes in the current discourse).

V. CONCLUSION

Therefore I believe that in many cases definite noun phrases such as proper names when used for the first time on a discourse non-anaphorically do not modify already existing discourse referents, and nevertheless, as all definite terms, introduce something known, but known not due to the acquaintance with the current discourse or its context but due to the existence of certain narrative. It may also be supposed that in such cases definite terms do double job: first they introduce new discourse referents as indefinite terms do, and then they trigger the substitution of these referents by interdiscursive referents which "file cards" are determined by certain salient narratives. A narrative usually consists of a set of discourses which are not replicas of each other and represent at least one common subject in its developments or from different sides. "Cards of files" of interdiscursive referents determined by such sequences of discourses may be called narrative meanings of expressions which introduce them. And narratives which determine these meanings may be considered by analogy with presuppositions as entities being activated by uses of corresponding expressions. I think

that in many cases the uses of proper names and other definite terms in discourses are triggers of some existing narrative.

The simplest case of a narrative activation may be represented in the following example. Suppose yesterday I discussed with my wife new sofa; this discussion formed the "file" of a sofa containing, say, the following elements: "x is comfortable", "x is beautiful", "x matches the room". Now I look at the sofa and say "It is not so good after all". My wife understands looking at me what I am talking about and, correspondingly, with what past discourse the current one is connected anaphorically; therefore she may understand what "It" in what I've said refers to. My phrase (or better to say its proper interpretation) activates the past "file" of a sofa making it part of a current discourse and add new elements in it ("x is not so good"). This use of "It" links it not with the context (the circumstances of a statement) but with certain past talk. Its interpretation guided by this reading saturates it with a narrative meaning: the minimum of information about the interdiscursive referent which is available from the acquaintance with the appropriate narrative. I think that in the cases when a proper name is not linked anaphorically with some expression used in the same discourse or with some presupposed content its main contribution into communication is the connection of its content with its narrative meaning. For instance I may use the name "Cicero" to refer to just the same individual whom people belonging to certain group refer to, and have no definite idea of who Cicero is. The idea of a narrative meaning of a name presupposes that when some sequence of discourses produces a narrative where a set of descriptions determine an interdiscursive referent, there are many expressions (or at least one) which are standard triggers of this narrative in communications, and this name is one of them (or is identical with the exclusive trigger if this is the case). Thus people created more or less consistent narrative of European history where among other things a man whose standard name is "Cicero" figures; as a result we have a known from this history subject - Cicero - which has in that history certain properties defining it. This is not a real man but a representation which is part of historical narrative. It is normally activated when "Cicero" is used in a proper way.

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