Notes on Reference and Referring

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April 2, 2013

Ch. 7 – Capuano

• Concerned with the mechanism question: “What is the mechanism that binds linguistic expressions in the mouths of speakers and the objects of which they say things?” (p. 190)? In particular, he is interested in making sense out of this question in the context of the theory of direct reference (DR)

• Argues for two distinctions as a way of clarifying how reference works. This has implications for the cognitive background of reference (specifically, having in mind), the way we read Kaplan and Donnellan, and how we understand DR

• The distinctions are these:
  o Reference/denotation: reference is cognitive activity “in which the object comes to the mind before the semantic relation”; denotation is the cognitive activity “in which the mind reaches out to the object before the semantic relation” (p. 192)
  o Referential model of DR/propositional model of DR: according to the former, DR involves “a speaker ascribing a predicate to an object the speaker had in mind”—here the proposition is not important and what is important is the “route that brought the object to be a subject of discourse” (p. 192); according to the latter, DR involves the proposition (and especially the proposition expressed) explicitly by virtue of involving a rule for determining the denotation and not by virtue of having it in mind (p. 196)
    ▪ Question: does the prop model involve denotation and the ref model reference? Or can the ref model involve both reference and denotation? The essay is not clear about this…
    ▪ To “have something in mind” is “for that object to cause the use of a linguistic expression to go back to it” (p. 195)

• He argues that Donnellan is the first to see that “reference is fundamentally referential”
  o By this he means that the outside-in cognitive relation supports the production of utterances involving NPs that are best understood on the referential model of DR
  o The beliefs, intentions, conventions, and rules involved in language production don’t figure into reference and don’t figure into the semantic content. (This is in contrast with “Krike’s phenomenon” in SR&SR, which “has to do with the beliefs and intentions of a speaker when using a linguistic expression” (p. 195)
  o According to Capuano, “the history of the world made it the case that the speaker referred to the object she had in mind” (p. 193)
  o This view leans hard on the misdescription condition, making that the mark of reference (or at least highlighting it as an implication of this view)
Questions
  o The “reference as referential” model makes cognitive states irrelevant to the act of using words to make objects the subject of discourse, and assimilates reference to perception (a la Donnellan). But whereas we are passive when it comes to perception, we are surely not passive when it comes to using language. Use of a NP to make something the subject of discourse is not a reflex act, like kicking one’s leg when tapped with the doctor’s hammer; it is something we do, and so is intentional. This makes intentions relevant to the act in all cases, including the referential case.
  o Further, while a speaker’s beliefs about whether or not the intended referent has the properties expressed by the NP may be irrelevant to her utterance, surely her beliefs about whether those properties can guide uptake on the part of her audience do; beliefs are not irrelevant to the choice of NP in the referential case.
  o The notion of “having in mind” seems to make us passive vehicles through which objects act to make themselves subject of discourse. Surely this is an unreasonable conception of having in mind?
  o Does this view make the correct prediction about the Neptune case?
  o By making causality the key to having in mind, this view doesn’t seem to close off unwanted cases of causality, e.g., where an evil doctor places a visual image of something that the subject hasn’t seen in the head of an unsuspecting victim through some sort of technological intervention—this is perfectly causal, but we surely wouldn’t want to say that the subject has the ability to “have that object in mind” in the technical sense of Capuano. (Would we?)