A Cognitive-pragmatic Account of Specificational Sentences

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INTRODUCTION In semantic-pragmatic studies on specificational sentences (e.g., (1) The winner is … John!), one question that often arises is what the subject NP represents. In (1), "the winner" is equated with John, but cannot represent John himself, since the tautology "John is John" is not specificational. This paper proposes a new account from a cognitive-pragmatic perspective mainly based on two studies: (a) Jackendoff (2012), which provides the idea of reference files (see below) and (b) Scott-Phillips (2015), a cognitive-pragmatics-oriented study of the origin and evolution of linguistic communication, which suggests design features of languages.

COGNITIVE FOUNDATIONS Reference is a phenomenon wherein a linguistic expression is connected to an external referent, where there must be something cognitive that is happening in our mind. It is most plausible to posit that the referring is mediated by some mental representation which corresponds to the referent and is also somehow linked to the expression. Such mental representations were called reference files (henceforth, RFs) by Jackendoff. They contain all potentially relevant information about the referred individuals. Importantly, humans deploy RFs to keep track of things even when they are not using language.

I propose adding an ID of the referent to RFs as a part of their data structure in order to distinguish files of different referents. For example, when you and your friend drink cups of coffee, you try (and sometimes fail) to keep track of your cup so as not to confuse them; thus, you deploy two RFs with constant IDs, *a* and *b*. IDs can be free variables when the referent is yet to be identified. Suppose you are looking for two missing pieces while solving a jigsaw puzzle. Each of them has an RF with a distinct free variable ID, *x* and *y*, with other information about them, such as their shapes and envisioned looks. Free variable IDs play a crucial role to deal with so-called non-referential NPs in the same way as normal referential NPs.

PRAGMATIC FOUNDATIONS According to Scott-Phillips, "a language is the rich, structured collection of conventional codes that augment ostensive-inferential communication [or, OIC] within a given community" (p. 20), and the evolutionary function of OIC, of which linguistic communication is a special case, is mind reading for the listener and the manipulation of others' mental states for the speaker. In OIC, speakers also must read listeners' minds so as to provide appropriate evidence (e.g., utterances) for their communicative and informative intentions and make themselves understood. Humans, as competent ostensive-inferential communicators, are apt mind readers and, to a large extent, are able to guess what their interlocutors do/do not/want to know. Given all of the above, languages are arguably designed for ostensive-inferential communication, where a speaker constantly estimates the hearer's mental states, and the meaning of NPs should be optimized for OIC.

ANALYSIS Based on these tenets, the semantic-pragmatic aspects of the specificational sentence (1) can be newly analyzed. In a typical situation, before the utterance, the speaker assumes that the hearer knows who John is but not who the winner is. If this assumption is correct, in their minds, the John file has a constant ID, *a*. Thus, the hearer can link such an RF to the predicate NP *John*. In contrast, regarding the subject NP "the winner," the listener has not identified the referent before the utterance, although he knows that there is some winner. Therefore, he has an RF containing a free variable ID, *x*, and the information that <*x* is the winner (of such and such).> The speaker, assuming this, expects the hearer to link the NP to such an RF. Of course, the speaker, knowing that the winner is John, does not have such a file with a free variable. Instead, in the speaker's mind, the John file with a constant ID contains the information that <*a* is the winner.> The listener, understanding the utterance, replaces *x* with *a*, merging two files containing the same ID into one, and he thus improves his knowledge.

If the analysis above is on the right track, we can argue that the speaker's meaning of the NP "the winner" is the RF in the estimated hearer's mind with a free variable, *x*, and a description of <*x* is the winner (of such and such)>. Generally, such a "non-referential" NP of a specificational sentence expresses an RF with a free variable ID and a description of <*x* is *NP*>, and the variable is to be fixed by the constant ID of the RF linked to the other NP.

CONCLUSION Many other constructions (e.g., concealed questions, some existential sentences, and attributive use of NPs) involve NPs linked to a free variable ID RF in estimated hearers' or mentioned people's mind. To additionally cover these, the author is making a theory of cognitive semantics and pragmatics of NPs, expanding Jackendoff's notion of RFs.

References Jackendoff, Ray. 2012. *A User's Guide to Thought and Meaning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. **/** Scott-Phillips, Thom. 2015. *Speaking Our Minds*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.