DEFINITE REFERENCE

There are many types of definite reference:

- proper names
  - Jake, Clare...
- deictic pronouns and determiners:
  - this man, that girl...
- personal pronouns:
  - he, she...
- definite descriptions
  - the girl ...

All seem to be used to uniquely identify things in the world.
REFERENCE AS AN ACTION

- As we argued in our Semantics class, reference can in part be viewed as an action (something a speaker does).
- Speaker intends her listener to be able to pick out a referent in a particular context.
  - E.g. *The tall man in the red shirt*
  - *That guy*
  - *Him*
- The listener needs to:
  - Understand that the speaker intends him to identify an entity
  - Identify that entity according to the referring expression the speaker produced.
WHAT GOVERNS REFERENTIAL CHOICES?

- The choice of the form of a referring expression is governed by **mutual knowledge**.

**Mutual knowledge:**
- Things that the speaker and listener both know.
- Speaker and listener not only know these things; they also know that the other person knows these things.

**So reference has two components:**
- Speaker’s goals (to identify something).
- Speaker’s beliefs about the listener (that s/he is capable of identifying the thing, due to mutual knowledge).
Mutual knowledge can be perceptual (speaker and listener are talking about something they can both see, or hear, or smell...)

Scene: *S & L are both looking at this picture.*

S: *That guy looks a bit like a chimp.*

L: *Yep. But he managed to get elected!*
Mutual knowledge can also arise due to shared community knowledge

S: The president said we should eat less salt.
L: He should concentrate on more important things, surely!
THE ROLE OF INFERENCE

The speaker has to:
- Intend to identify something
- Have some knowledge of what the listener knows

The listener has to:
- Infer from the speaker’s utterance that she intends him to identify something.
- Figure out what the intended thing is.
REFERENCE NEEDN’T BE PRECISE

- Speakers and listeners still manage to understand each other in the absence of precise information.
- We often use vague expressions, or expressions that aren’t literally true of the referent:
  - *the bluish thing over there*
  - *that thingy*
  - *Mr Suit*
    - [for someone about whom the only thing S and L know is that he always wears a suit]
  - *the ham sandwich*
    - [spoken by a waitress in a restaurant, about one of the clients]
Imagine that somebody called Smith has just been murdered. Jones has been charged with the murder and he’s on trial. He behaves oddly. Afterwards, you tell a friend: “The man who murdered Smith is insane.”

- Your description suggests a **referential use**. You **intend** it to refer to Jones.
- But what if Jones were innocent?
  - The description *the man who murdered Smith* wouldn’t apply to Jones.
  - Yet your act of reference would still be to Jones.
  - This suggests that there’s a cleavage between the descriptive aspect and the referential aspect.
Imagine that somebody called Smith has just been murdered. You come across the murdered body of Smith. You’ve no idea who did it. You turn to your friend and say: “The man who murdered Smith is insane.”

Here, apparently, the man who murdered Smith isn’t really referring to someone identifiable (you’ve no idea who murdered Smith).

Your description here has an attributive use, equivalent to Whoever murdered Smith.
REFERENTIAL VS ATTRIBUTIVE

Referential:
- NPs used by a speaker who is able to identify a referent.
- Even if the descriptive content is wrong, they may still refer successfully.
  - This is because the listener can still manage to infer what referent is intended.

Attributive:
- NPs used by a speaker who assumes the existence of a referent that satisfies some descriptive content.
- An “invitation” to the listener to assume that such a referent exists (even if it can’t be identified)
OTHER POSSIBLY ATTRIBUTIVE EXAMPLES

We often use indefinite NPs attributively:

- I want to marry a millionaire.
- The investigators still haven’t identified the killer.
In our Semantics class, we’ve considered the role of proper names and contrasted two theories:

- Names are like descriptions
  - “Shakespeare” = “the English playwright who wrote Hamlet”

- Names just express a direct connection to a referent
  - “Shakespeare” is just the identifier of a person we know to have existed historically (and independently of whatever else we know about him)
NAMES, COMMUNITY AND CONTEXT

- Whatever the proper semantic analysis of names is, it’s clear that our use of them often relies on conventional associations.

  S: Sorry, I tore your Dante
  L: Dammit, that was a signed copy!

- Since Dante is (was) actually a person, the listener’s understanding of the above reference must clearly rely on some additional inferences, possibly aided by context.
  - The inference relies on a conventionally assumed connection between a name and another property (Dante was an author)

- This lends credence to the pragmatic view of reference: our inferences do not rely exclusively on literal (semantic) content.
NAMES, COMMUNITY AND CONTEXT

- The same seems to be at work in the following:

  [Restaurant scene]
  Waitress: *The Margherita wants a beer.*
  Waiter: *OK, I’ll take it round to him myself.*

- Here, the connection is based on the association between a person and what they actually ordered.

- So the listener is able to infer the speaker’s intended referent.
OTHER EXAMPLES

There are many examples of this kind that are so common, we don’t see anything odd about them.

- The US has issued a statement.
- London showed a sharp drop in stock prices.
- Italy lost the World Cup final.
- ...

In all of these cases, we rely on a pragmatic connection between:
- the literal referent (a country, a city, ...) and
- The intended referent (a government, a stock market, a team)

Sometimes, this kind of reference is called metonymic – it uses the whole to identify one part or aspect of it.
Whenever we interpret a referring expression, we don’t just focus on the expression itself; we are also aided by the surrounding linguistic material.

Compare:

- Italy lost the World Cup [= the Italian national team]
- Italy has a serious economic problem [= the country]
- Italy voted against the resolution [= the government]

The default interpretation in all these cases is restricted by what is said about the referent.
CO-TEXT: A MORE EXTREME EXAMPLE

- The role of the surrounding linguistic context – or co-text – is even more clear in the following:
  - The Margherita **wants a beer.** [= a client]
  - The Margherita **is made with tomatoes and mozzarella.** [= the pizza]

- Very difficult to have the first interpretation in the second context.
CO-TEXT

- We could think of a referring expression like *the margherita* or *Italy* as specifying a range of possible referents:
  - Literal (the country Italy)
  - Others, via pragmatic connection (government, team etc)

- The co-text limits that range to the most likely one (or the most likely few).
Co-text could be thought of as part of the context in which an utterance is produced, in addition to:

- The physical surroundings;
- Community-based information;
- Other types of information that we might mutually share with the listener.

It’s very likely that we depend on these to different degrees, depending on the situation:

- *Your ten-thirty just cancelled.*
  - Co-text restricts this, but not enough: bus? Person? Taxi?
  - Context may make it clear that a person is intended (e.g. If the situation is an office or workplace)
Pronouns and anaphora

We don’t just use referring expressions to introduce referents, we also have strategies to maintain them in discourse.

Usually we:

- Introduce a referent using an indefinite:
  - *A woman* walked in.
  - This establishes the referent in discourse.
- Subsequently refer to the referent using a definite:
  - *She* was really tall.
  - *Her dog* was with her.
  - *The woman* sat across from me.

This sort of “backward” reference is called anaphora.
Anaphors have antecedents.
ANAPHORIC REFERENCE

[Context: there are three old women]
A: **The old woman** is my grandmother.
B: Which one do you mean?
A: The middle one.
B: Oh.
A: **She**’s 90 years old.

[... 15 minutes later ...]

B: By the way, **the old woman**’s gone. The other two are still around though.
ANAPHORIC REFERENTS CAN CHANGE

*Peel and slice some potatoes.*  
*Put them in cold water.*

- In this case, the original referent changes (from whole potatoes to peeled slices), but the pronoun still succeeds.
CATAPHORIC REFERENCE

- In yet other cases, we can refer forward, instead of backward:
  - I turned a corner and almost bumped into him. He was my uncle.

- This is a case of cataphoric reference
ANAPHORA IN GENERAL

- Anaphoric reference involves:
  - Referring to an entity which has already been introduced into the discourse.
  - Can be done using a pronoun, or a definite, among others.

- Usually, anaphora requires that the referent is salient in order to succeed.
  - I.e. The referent needs to be fairly recent, and familiar enough to both interlocutors.

- Ultimately, anaphora succeeds if:
  - The listener and the speaker are both attending to the same referent.
SALIENCE AND ATTENTION

- **My friend** paid me a visit
  - Clear that *he* = *my friend*

- **He’s** in the city for a day.
  - *He* = ?
  - In this case, there is one most salient referent that *he* could refer to.

- My friend and his brother paid us a visit.
  - *They* = *my friend + his brother*
  - Here, the most salient plural referent for *they* is also clear.

- They’re in the city for a day.
  - *He* = ?
  - Here, it’s not at all clear who *he* is intended to identify.
    - There are two equally (?) salient possible antecedents.
ASSOCIATIVE ANAPHORA (BRIDGING)

- There is a special type of anaphora, where instead of referring back to an entity, we refer back to something associated with it.

  - I bought a bicycle.
  - The tyres were low.

- The introduced referent is the bicycle, but the referent in the subsequent sentence is not to the bicycle.
- It seems as if the listener here will infer that, since there is a bicycle in the context, there are also tyres (since bicycles tend to have them).
SUMMARY

- Successful reference depends on:
  - Mutually held beliefs between speaker and listener
  - Context (including co-text and salience)

- When references are understood, there is both a process of:
  - Understanding the literal content of the speaker’s utterance
  - Understanding the speaker’s intention