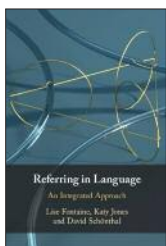


Book Reviews



Referring in Language: An Integrated Approach

Lise Fontaine, Katy Jones & David Schöenthal (Eds.)
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. 244 pages.
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In recent decades, the study of reference has emerged as a fertile yet fragmented field. Theoretical and empirical explorations of referentiality have been widely pursued in philosophy of language, formal semantics, pragmatics, cognitive linguistics, discourse analysis, and computational linguistics. Each domain, however, has tended to operate within its own paradigmatic assumptions, often addressing the phenomenon of reference in isolation from complementary perspectives. Consequently, there is a growing need for a more integrative account, one that not only recognizes the multifaceted nature of reference but also systematically connects its cognitive, functional, grammatical, and discursive dimensions. Fontaine, Jones and Schöenthal's (2023) recent publication *Referring in Language: An Integrated Approach* responds directly to this need, providing a unified framework that seeks to overcome the fragmentation in the field. The volume is both timely and necessary, because it reflects and addresses the current demands in linguistic theory and applied language studies for cross-disciplinary syntheses of reference phenomena.

The authors' stated objective is to "address the need for an integrated approach to referring, one that brings together functional grammar and cognitive linguistics within a model of context and one that is informed by empirical evidence" (p. 217). This formulation encapsulates both the theoretical ambitions and methodological stance of the volume. Importantly, the book is not simply a juxtaposition of disparate theories but a concerted attempt to develop a coherent, epistemologically grounded model of referring expressions, their functions, and their contexts of use. In this regard, the book fills a significant scholarly gap and speaks to both novice linguists and seasoned researchers interested in advancing the theoretical landscape of referential language.

The volume comprises eleven chapters, distributed across three thematically organized parts. Part I lays the theoretical groundwork. Chapter 1 introduces the core motivation and interdisciplinary scope of the book. It surveys reference studies in philosophy, cognitive linguistics, and pragmatics, though with limited emphasis, and identifies key challenges in integrating these perspectives. However, one noticeable shortcoming is the absence of a full treatment of pragmatics as a distinct and indispensable tradition in reference theory. While later chapters refer to Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle and speech act theory (Hanks, 2019), their introduction in the opening chapter would have offered a more comprehensive epistemological map. Additionally, the lack of engagement with Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995), a prominent framework wherein reference is interpreted as a matter of inferring speaker intent, is particularly surprising. Given that Relevance Theory offers a cognitively grounded model of inferential communication, its absence limits the integrative scope that the book aims to achieve. A brief comparative treatment of relevance-based inferencing and the authors' cognitive-functional model would have strengthened the volume's conceptual foundation.

Chapters 2 and 3 provide further theoretical elaboration. Chapter 2 interrogates the dichotomy of definiteness and indefiniteness, arguing persuasively that referentiality arises from the interplay between lexicogrammatical, textual, and cognitive factors. Notably, the authors emphasize that there is no deterministic mapping between formal markers and referential meaning, that is, a position that resonates with recent cognitive semiotic work, in which referential relations are constructed at the level of enunciation. Chapter 3 defines basic terminologies and categories necessary for later chapters through a cognitive-functional analysis of referring expressions. Despite the fact that this chapter is methodologically consistent with the rest of the volume, its conceptual overlap with Chapter 2 creates some redundancy. A more distinct thematic boundary could have enhanced clarity and minimized repetition.

Part II comprises Chapters 4 through 6, and presents the book's central analytical contribution: the development and application of the notions of *typicality* and *atypicality* in referring expressions. Chapter 4 introduces this dichotomy and grounds it in both linguistic and cognitive theory. The proposal of *typicality* as an organizing principle in reference is particularly innovative, as it allows for a gradable, context-sensitive account of referential phenomena. The chapter lays the groundwork for empirical explorations in

subsequent chapters by arguing that referential forms should be understood as probabilistically distributed rather than categorically determined.

Chapters 5 and 6 explore how typical referring expressions vary across communicative modes, specifically, spontaneous versus scripted discourse. The authors contend that different text types exhibit different distributions of complex versus simple noun phrases, with these patterns being influenced by factors such as information density, planning time, and speaker intention. The methodology here is well-motivated, and the findings open new directions for research on the information-structural correlates of referential choice. However, the authors also acknowledge the limitations of their dataset and call for further empirical validation through corpus-based and cross-linguistic studies. Importantly, the treatment of referential chains in these chapters suggests that referentiality is inherently linked to textual cohesion and thematic development, or in other words, an insight with far-reaching implications for discourse analysis, genre theory, and applied linguistics.

Part III shifts focus to less canonical, and often underexplored, aspects of reference. Chapter 7 deals with reference in collaborative and adversarial contexts. While the authors successfully demonstrate the variability of referential processes across interactional settings, terminological ambiguities persist, particularly in the use of “common ground”, “shared knowledge”, as well as “shared cultural knowledge”. These concepts are central to theories of communication but are not rigorously differentiated here. The authors’ treatment of referential repair in collaborative discourse is insightful, but a critical question remains insufficiently addressed: Is reference inherently cooperative? Drawing on Sperber and Wilson (1995), and more recently O’Grady and Bartlett (2023), one could argue that reference is driven less by cooperation than by the speaker’s communicative needs and assumptions about the listener’s access to knowledge. This theoretical tension could be more explicitly addressed to enhance the chapter’s analytical rigor.

Chapter 8 addresses the $A(n)+N+RRC$ structure and its relation to lexical cohesion as theorized by Halliday and Hasan (1976). The authors argue convincingly that co-extension should be redefined to include larger syntagmatic units. Although the discussion is based on journalistic texts alone, the implications for cohesion theory and genre-based analysis are significant. A more diverse textual sample would have bolstered the chapter’s generalizability.

Chapter 9 provides a concise yet informative overview of reference in child language. Although the chapter is necessarily limited in scope, it offers a valuable reminder that developmental perspectives are essential to a comprehensive theory of reference. Chapter 10 presents one of the most original arguments in the volume by reconceptualizing referential metonymy as a subtype of reference, rather than a type of metonymy. The analysis is situated in medical discourse, where referential metonymy often occurs. However, the discussion could have been enriched by a systematic comparison with metaphor, that is, a figure frequently co-occurring with metonymy in professional discourses. This omission constitutes a missed opportunity to explore the interaction between figurative language and referential strategies.

Chapter 11, the epilogue, summarizes the book's contributions and outlines directions for future research. While it offers a competent synthesis, it lacks a critical evaluation of the volume's own limitations. For instance, the narrow linguistic scope (largely English-based data), the limited treatment of formal semantics, and the insufficient integration of pragmatics as an independent field all merit mention. A more reflective concluding chapter would have enhanced the transparency and scholarly responsibility of the work.

The book under review is a theoretically ambitious and empirically grounded volume that makes a significant contribution to the study of reference. Its primary strength lies in its attempt to bridge cognitive linguistics and functional grammar within a usage-based framework. The concept of referential *typicality* is particularly noteworthy, offering a productive lens through which to revisit long-standing issues in definiteness, information structure, and discourse cohesion. Nevertheless, the book is not without its drawbacks. Key among them are the aforementioned underrepresentation of pragmatic and formal semantic traditions, limited engagement with cross-linguistic data, and occasional conceptual redundancy across chapters. Despite these limitations, the volume is a commendable scholarly effort that sets the stage for future interdisciplinary research on reference. It is recommended not only for specialists in reference theory but also for scholars in discourse analysis, psycholinguistics, and applied linguistics. Given its theoretical breadth, empirical depth, and pedagogical clarity, the book is likely to become a cornerstone reference in the field, and perhaps, in time, a future classic.

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