

Function and structure of the nominal group: from predication to reference

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Abstract

This paper attempts to shed light on the way the basic acts of predicating and referring, as exemplified in the nominal group, are to be taken account of in grammatical theory. The author wants to suggest that FG provides a good alternative to other theories in this respect. Thus, it is noted that the different functions of the nominal group described in SFG can be basically regarded as cognitive operations to be studied at different levels of term structure specification and in connection with the construction of an SoA. However, FG's descriptive framework is at present unable to deal effectively with such matters as the differences between fixed and variable reference, or between epithets and classifiers. Some tentative solutions are offered. Other relevant subjects such as the cognitive and pragmatic motivation of the operations of constructive and identifying reference, the adequacy of the layering hypothesis, and the degree of pragmatic and psychological adequacy of the account of predication and reference are also considered.

1. Introduction: the nominal group

In Halliday's Systemic-Functional Grammar (SFG) we find an analysis of intraclausal constituents in terms of groups and phrases (see Halliday 1985:158ff). Groups are taken to be expansions of words, that is, word complexes which have a certain logical structure (like Head and Modifier). A phrase is the contraction of a clause, with no logical structure. Thus, in a prepositional phrase the preposition is like a minor verb or Predicator which has a nominal group as its Complement¹ (cfr. *across the lake/crossing the lake*).

Modifier plus Head is a multivariate structure which represents distinct values in the structure of the nominal group, to be distinguished from univariate structures which involve only one value. Thus, each element of the group *an expensive tennis racket* is a different variable entering into a configuration of relations with the rest of the elements. In *dogs, cats and rabbits* what we have, on the other hand, is but repetitions of the same variable (see Halliday 1981).

On describing the experiential structure of the nominal group, Halliday (1985) lists the following functions and their realizations:

<i>Function</i>	<i>Typical realization</i>
Deictic	determiner
Post-deictic	adjective

Numerative	numeral
Epithet	adjective
Classifier	noun/adjective
Thing	noun

Although having different values, all the components listed above belong with the experiential level of grammatical description and share some properties in common, for each somehow affects the status of the Thing, which is the semantic head of the nominal group.

However, since these components belong to a multivariate structure, the functional status of each of them thus being different, one may wonder whether there could be a better way to account for their value.

Halliday's description of the functional status of the components of the nominal group is limited in scope, since it describes only what each component does on the Thing. Of course, this description can be defended by pointing to the fact that the value of an element within a system depends on the effect it has on other elements of the system. Thus, a Deictic seems to point to a subset and an Epithet to a property of the Thing. But this misses the point that by relating to the Thing in different ways each component is adding certain defining features to the event which is meant to be designated. Consider:

- (1) A boy hit the ball
- (2) That boy hit the tennis ball

Both sentences share a lot of semantic properties, but in (2) the nominal groups have been completed to a larger extent than in (1), in such a way that the event under description is more specific. The set of potential referents of the nominal expressions in (2) is smaller than in (1).

It is a well-known linguistic fact that when we speak we do not specify all the possible information we have about the things we want to refer to. We supply as much as it is convenient for our purposes. The linguistic system provides us with a range of available options to give or leave out information. For example, just by adding a number of modifiers to a Head, we can increase the complexity of our description without overstepping the boundaries of one single nominal group:

- (3a) a table
- b) a kitchen table
- c) a wooden kitchen table
- d) a Chinese wooden kitchen table
- e) a brown Chinese wooden kitchen table
- f) a dark brown Chinese wooden kitchen table
- g) an old dark brown Chinese wooden kitchen table
- h) an expensive old dark brown Chinese wooden kitchen table
- i) those two expensive old dark brown Chinese wooden kitchen tables, etc.

As the group becomes more complex, the degree of specification is higher and the set of potential referents becomes smaller. Of course, many speakers of English would feel that the larger the number of modifiers the smaller is the probability of occurrence, an effect which is independent of the grammatical correctness of the expression².

There are many different grammatical and otherwise feasible possibilities of specifying further about an event, like breaking up the whole complex and giving the same information in separate sentences of a same textual unit. But what interests us most now is the fact that the nominal group -and any structural unit for that matter- offers us a set of options which the speaker may use to make meaning. Also, it is interesting to note that reference is not only changed or shaded as the group is further specified, but it is also constructed in a way which is interactive with the context of the utterance³. Of course, this exceeds Halliday's account of the way the components of the nominal group function, for in doing such an analysis we are going beyond the realm of the linguistic system into that of communication.

Also the functions of Deictic, Numerative, Epithet and Classifier involve different types of operation on the semantic Head of the group, but these operations are only described without providing any further indication of the way they contribute to the construction of the clause. Since the operations are different, it follows that the grammar needs to account for them at different levels of description.

This type of description calls for a grammatical model which studies the way components work at different levels and in relation to a theory of reference. In what follows we shall argue that the layered-clause model, proposed by Hengeveld (1989) within the scope of Dik's Functional Grammar (FG; see Dik 1978, 1989), provides the grounds for the sort of explanation that we require. The schema of our exposition will be as follows: first, we shall deal with the matter of reference in FG; then we shall sketch the basics of Hengeveld's layering hypothesis with some emphasis on the notion of "state of affairs". Then we shall examine each of the possible constituents of the nominal group in the light of their structural and functional characteristics. Finally, we shall suggest some improvements on some of the explanations given by Dik on the matters of deixis and term construction.

2. Reference

On dealing with the function and structure of intraclausal constituents certain problems arise which are related to age-old philosophical quibbles about the nature of reference and predication.

In effect, every language has a number of resources to talk about the world of experience, to create alternative worlds, and to communicate within the boundaries of the constitutive features of the intended world of reference. In other words, it is possible in every language both to refer and to construct a world of reference.

Now, reference by means of a linguistic expression is no trivial matter. It has been customary to deal with the "reference" of an expression in terms of the contrast with its "sense". This is Frege's well-known distinction. There are other related dichotomies like "intension"/"extension", and "connotation"/"denotation". Here, for practical

purposes, we shall confine our account to a trichotomy which equates intension to sense, and extension to denotation, but which differentiates between extension and reference. Thus, we shall take the intension (or sense) of an expression to be its meaning in terms of the expression itself. The intension of an expression is thus established by the interrelationships of its meaning components. By the extension (or denotation) of an expression we shall understand its set of potential referents, and the actual set of referents we shall term reference. It follows that actual reference is only achieved when the linguistic expression is fully contextualized, where by context we understand the whole set of assumptions which the language user holds about the world of reference for the expression. Some of these assumptions will come from his knowledge of the world, some from the way he perceives the context of situation, some from the previous discourse, and some from any relevant inference he is able to make; Dik (1989:9) refers to this as the “pragmatic information” of the language user.

It also follows that, in order to arrive at actual reference, we need to use certain intensional clues which are related to the meaning of the lexical items. In other words, the language user has to make use of predications. For example, if we predicate the feature “large” of the item “cat” we are restricting its set of potential referents or extension in such a way that whatever we may judge to be “small cats” will be excluded from the set.

3. *Reference in FG*

The original treatment of reference in FG is best understood in connection to the question of the three standards of adequacy (pragmatic, psychological, typological) it seeks to attain. We shall deal with them briefly (see Dik 1989:12-14).

A functional grammar is not conceived, unlike a formal grammar, as a self-contained system, but as part of a wider theory of verbal interaction. In this, FG bears a resemblance to SFG, which understands language as part of the more general social system (see Halliday 1978). A functional grammar, according to this criterion is not independent of pragmatic considerations. Also, a grammar has to be psychologically adequate, thus relating to psychological explanations of linguistic competence and behaviour. Finally, it has to be typologically adequate, thus being capable of providing descriptions for languages of any type, and of accounting for similarities and differences between them.

These standards subsume or presuppose others like the standard of descriptive adequacy, proposed for Transformational Grammar (TG). In fact, it is possible to see that FG’s aims are greater than those of formal grammars. Thus, descriptive adequacy is envisaged by transformational linguists as the capacity of the grammar to account for native speaker’s intuitions. In the TG tradition, however, such intuitions are limited to the native speaker’s internal grammar, a finite set of rules and principles that make up his competence, whereas in the functional perspective the interest is centred upon what the speaker can do with language.

The obvious advantage of the functional over the formal perspective is that the former allows the linguist to explain linguistic expressions -and thus find underlying

relationships- in terms of the way the expressions can be used⁴. It is difficult to understand what profit is derived from a linguistic theory which tries to explain relationships without giving any insight into the purpose they serve.

Dik sees psychological adequacy as a consequence of pragmatic adequacy. Language use is related to linguistic competence. This line of thinking is not foreign to current work in pragmatics, particularly to Sperber and Wilson's theories (see Sperber & Wilson 1986; Wilson & Sperber 1988)⁵, in which communicating is interpreted as altering the set of assumptions which make up the "cognitive environment" of the language user. The cognitive environment is the full set of beliefs of the speaker at any moment in the interaction, a notion which is roughly equivalent to Dik's "pragmatic information" (see #2 above).

This sort of analysis has important consequences for the way a grammar is to be constructed, especially in order to account for the role of reference in the theory. Traditional analyses of reference have been made in terms of truth values with respect to some possible world. Possible worlds are normally taken to be possible states of the real world. However, in line with his interpretation of verbal communication, Dik suggests that reference is independent of actual existence, and that it should be studied with respect to a mental world.

Although not explicitly stated, FG is sensitive to the distinction between potential and actual reference⁶. Thus, the extension or potential reference of a term is given at that stage of clause construction in which no grammatical device of reference has been applied. Then, when such devices have been applied, we get actual reference and the construction of what Dik calls a "state of affairs", a concept which we shall take to be crucial to a theory of reference (see below). It is clear that only actual reference is relevant to the active definition of a mental model of the speaker. Potential reference is part of his long-term pragmatic information about an item. Thus, the potential reference for "dog" ranges from any dog the speaker may call to mind -whether a composite dog or a specific instance coming from his world of experience- to the class of all dogs according to what the speaker understands by dog⁷.

One last thing which merits our attention is Dik's distinction between "constructive" and "identifying" reference (Dik 1987; 1989:114, 139), both of which are types of actual reference. Constructive reference happens when the speaker gets the hearer to construe a referent by means of an expression; identifying reference, when the speaker helps the hearer to identify a referent which is presumed to be available to the hearer from the context of utterance (his pragmatic information). According to Dik, definite terms (eg. those usually marked by "the") are used to establish identifying reference, and indefinite terms (eg. those usually marked by "a", "some") to establish constructive reference. The former point to a referent already established in the discourse; the latter introduce a new referent.

The distinction explains well the discourse value of the definite and indefinite articles in sentences like (4) and (5):

(4)The boy hit the ball

(5)A boy hit the ball

The boy either identifies or presupposes that the hearer is able to identify a specific referent. *A boy* is intended to mean “any boy” or “a certain boy”; the hearer is invited to construe a new referent for *boy* which satisfies the properties of the term. In the underlying term specification, the distinction between both types of referential operation is captured by means of the two operators of definiteness/indefiniteness (d/i)⁸.

However, there are other cases which suggest that there is no one-to-one correspondence between the proposed operators and the two types of reference. For example, take the following sentences:

(6) John came to the party but forgot to bring *the* cake

(7) John came to the party but forgot to bring *a* cake

(8) John came to the party but forgot to bring *the* mouse

(9) John came to the party but forgot to bring *a* mouse

Following Dik’s argumentation, it is easy to think of the article in the nominal group *the cake* in (6) as identifying a referent which is (supposed to be) available to the hearer. Even though the hearer does not know what cake the speaker is talking about, it will not be difficult for him to associate that specific item to regular features of his long-term knowledge about parties. In (7) the use of the indefinite article will get the hearer to create a referent for the item in his mental world. Now, (8) is readily interpreted as implying that *the mouse* referred to is a specific mouse that John was supposed to bring, a fact that we must assume is known by the hearer. But imagine a situation for (8) in which the hearer does not know that John was to bring a mouse. The hearer would just the same be compelled, in order to make sense of the sentence, to understand that the speaker believes that John was supposed to bring the mouse, but it is not possible for us to say that the hearer has identified any referent. Rather, he has had, first of all, to construe a referent for the item in question in order to be able to treat it as an identifiable item. In the same way in (9) the hearer is to construe a referent for the item introduced by the indefinite article, the only difference with (8) being that the item here is non-specific.

Much the same can be said of the contrast between (6) and (7). Whether reference is constructive or identifying will depend on the pragmatic knowledge shared by the speaker and the hearer, rather than on the presence or absence of definiteness.

Consider now the following sentences:

(10) S to A⁹: A dog is a faithful pet

(11) S to A: The dog is a faithful pet

In (10) the expression *a dogis* interpreted by Dik as involving the two operators of indefiniteness [i] and genericity [g]. The expression may be paraphrased as follows:

S to A: construe [=i] any arbitrary [=g] single referent that satisfies the property “dog”.

But again, this analysis fails to account for the use potential of the expression. For imagine a context in which two friends are conversing about dogs, and S taps on his dog’s head and utters sentence (10). It would be a case of identifying reference.

In (11), Dik paraphrases the value of the expression *the dog* as involving definiteness [d] and genericity [g]:

S to A: identify [=d] any arbitrary [=g] single referent that satisfies the property “dog”.

However, there is no apparent reason why reference here could not be of the constructive type; as a matter of fact, the hearer would have to call to mind any dog to interpret the sentence, and not necessarily one which is available to him.

Thus, a definite term may be used not only to identify but also to construe a referent, and conversely an indefinite term may be used to identify a referent, which modifies Dik’s account of reference with respect to this opposition.

Now, one might object here that this is a matter of implicature. The expression *a dog is a faithful pet* would normally refer to any dog, and by using it, instead of the alternative *my dog/this dog is a faithful pet*, the speaker is implicating that it is the case that his dog is just like any other dog (or a good example of the general category). However, the fact still remains that the expression *a dog* has been used to identify a referent. There is nothing intrinsic to the expression that guarantees the mode of reference. If a functional grammar is to be context-sensitive it should allow for such possibilities and not associate invariably a term operator with a mode of reference, especially since reference is a pragmatic operation. It might be suggested that instead of the d/i operators we had better use a pair of identifying/constructive (i/c) operators which are partly independent of specific grammatical or lexical realizations and which involve different cognitive operations¹⁰. Thus, whether either operator is used would be a function of the relationship between the sense of the linguistic expression and the context of utterance. This relationship would define the use potential of the item.

4. *The layering hypothesis*

Crucial to the definition of a mental world is the notion of “state of affairs” or SoA. An SoA is a mental event which is to be contrasted to a possible fact and a speech act. These last two are but personal attitudes or communicative perspectives of the SoA. Our next concern will be centred on the designation and gradual specification of an SoA.

The overall organization of the FG intraclausal paradigm responds to Hengeveld’s “layering hypothesis”, according to which there is a correspondence between the development of the clause and what it designates in terms of the pragmatic-mentalistic philosophy of reference discussed above. To each layer there corresponds a certain type of entity (see Dik 1989:50; Dik & Hengeveld 1991:256):

CLAUSE	speech act
PROPOSITION	possible fact
PREDICATION	state of affairs
TERM	entity
PREDICATE	property/relation

The crucial distinction is that between predications and propositions, which Dik and Hengeveld (Hengeveld 1989; Dik 1989) trace back to Vendler's (1967) differentiation between facts (=propositions) and events (=predications). For Vendler first order entities (objects, which are represented by terms, in the above schema) are primarily in space, secondarily in time; events (States of Affairs or SoAs), which are second-order entities, are primarily in time, secondarily in space; third-order entities, that is, facts (Possible Facts or PFs¹¹), are neither in space nor in time. SoAs, according to Dik (1989:248), "can be said to occur, take place, begin, last, and end; they can be perceived: watched, heard, felt, etc.; and they can be said to be sudden, gradual, violent, etc.". PFs, on the other hand, "can be said to be believed, known, or thought; they can be reason for surprise or doubt; they can be mentioned, denied, and remembered; and they can be said to be true or false in relation to the occurrence of some SoA in some world" (*ibid.*).

It is worth noting that entities and SoAs are interpreted as mental constructs, in full consonance with FG's cognitive-pragmatic philosophy. In fact, SoAs are but mental events evoked by linguistic means. However, pragmatic information is probably also composed of different SoAs, so a fully-fledged theory of reference will have to allow for the possibility of reference outside the world of information provided by linguistic means, what Dik calls "pragmatic information".

It must be noted that one of the main strengths of the layered model consists in its ability to match the gradual specification of an SoA with that of the predication. This results in both pragmatic and psychological adequacy, since the SoA is not constructed as an abstraction, independent of the cognitive and pragmatic operations carried out at the predication level. Thus it is appropriate to talk of a construction of the SoA paralleled by the step by step specification of the predication. In this process, predication and reference are seen as closely related linguistic acts bearing cognitive and pragmatic import.

5. FREGE'S SENSE COMPLETERS: THE CONSTRUCTION OF A STATE OF AFFAIRS

It seems to me that the division between SoAs and PFs also parallels to some extent Frege's distinction between sense and thought¹², the former being comparable to the notion of SoA and the latter to that of proposition. Thus, the sense of an expression is explained by Frege in terms of its cognitive value as "what we know when we understand it", and the thought as "that for which the question of truth arises". But what interests us most in this connection is the idea that senses may be incomplete while thoughts may not. For example, consider these sentences:

(12) Paul left school

(13) Paul left school when he turned twelve

(14) Paul left school yesterday

Sentence (12) just as it stands does not have a complete sense since it lacks the expression of the time when the event took place. Consequently it does not express a

thought either, but only a concept. Sentence (13), on the other hand, completes the sense of (12) by means of the expression *when he turned twelve*, which is taken to be a “sense completer”. It does express a thought as it stands.

This does not mean that sentence (12) cannot be used to express a thought for we might supply something like “on some occasion” or some other sense completer from the context of utterance. It follows that a thought is expressed only when the utterance has a complete sense by itself or is fully contextualized in order to supply the apparently missing information. Only then can the utterance be judged against standards of truthfulness.

Now let us turn to sentence (14). The reader may note the structural similarity between (13) and (14), despite which both sentences have different senses, for the time adverb *yesterday* does not seem to have the same referential quality as the dependent clause in (13). The time adverb has what we may call “variable reference”, which is contingent on the time of utterance, in contrast to the “fixed reference” in (13). Another difference between both time expressions is that the time clause creates its own context -that is, following Frege’s terminology, it is a sense completer in its own right-, but *yesterday* ties the sense of the utterance to extra-clausal contextual features.

According to Perry (1977), demonstrative expressions like *yesterday* and *today* pose a serious problem for Frege’s theory for they cannot be considered to provide completing senses like other time expressions. Perry distinguishes between what he terms the “role” and the “value” of a demonstrative. This I take to be -basically- the same distinction as Kaplan made between character and content (see # 6 below). The value of an expression varies with the context of use, the role remaining constant.

It is true that Frege’s account does not seem to cover such distinctions and that he may have thought, rather mistakenly, that demonstratives provide us with completing senses. However, this does not disprove the basic soundness of the notion of “sense-completers”. Reference is tied to space and time parameters and these have to be considered in any account of how the clause is developed.

An interesting parallel is to be found within FG’s study of underlying clause expansion through operators and satellites. According to the layering hypothesis, basic predicate frames, when they are filled with terms -which “hook up” with actual world entities- make up predications. A predication expresses a State of Affairs (SoA), that is, “something which can be the case in some world” (Dik 1989:107). What is most interesting about this conception of an SoA is that it involves an account of reference quite distinct from what philosophers like Donnellan, Kaplan and Kripke have thought it to be and, in some respects, closer to Frege’s own thinking. Thus, SoAs, as well as entities, are mental rather than world realities, and reference is allotted independence of “ontological commitment or existence in reality” (Dik 1989:113).

The status of an SoA is determined by the nature of the predication. In FG three types of predication are distinguished: nuclear, core and extended predications. In brief outline, the nuclear predication is formed by the insertion of terms into the basic predicate frames stored in the lexicon. The core and extended predications constitute expanded forms of the basic nuclear predication by the addition of elements which tend

to give full shape to the SoA referred to. The expansion is done by means of operators and satellites which work on two different levels of expansion. Operators and satellites capture the same type of additions but they differ in that operators get grammatical expression while satellites get lexical expression in the actual clause.

Dik represents the abstract nature of the predication as follows (Dik 1989:183):

$$\pi_2 e_i : \underbrace{[[[\pi_1 \text{ pred } (\text{arg})^n] (\sigma_1)^n] (\sigma_2)^n]}_{\text{nuclear}} (e_i)$$

$$\underbrace{\hspace{10em}}_{\text{core}}$$

$$\underbrace{\hspace{15em}}_{\text{extended}}$$

The nuclear predication is extended to a core predication by predicate operators (π_1) and satellites (σ_1), and then it is converted into an extended predication by level-two operators and satellites (π_2, σ_2) and the SoA variable (e_i)¹³.

Operators and satellites, at whatever level of underlying clause structure, are, as it were, sense completers which function by specifying, with different degrees of refinement, the SoA under description. Level 1 operators and satellites specify semantic properties internal to the constitution of the SoA, like aspectual distinctions and the specification of Manner, Speed and Instrument. Level 2 operators and satellites locate the SoA in space and time (these parameters being cognitive dimensions). It is the latter that are concerned with the various aspects of deixis we have considered so far. Thus, among other specifications such as aspect, polarity and objective mood, level 2 operators specify tense (as a grammatical category), and level 2 satellites specify -apart from cause, reason, result, purpose and circumstance- time and location (as cognitive parameters).

Since deixis is a matter of mental reference, sense-completing will be done, in this case, according to cognitive parameters. That way, we get a far more complete picture of the construction of an SoA. On the one hand, we understand that deixis is but a small part of the process; on the other hand, we may improve the functional account of deixis by having it deal with fixed and variable reference, something which might be done in the sense specification of the lexical item.

In sum, fixed and variable reference are, first of all, not optional but obligatory operations, inherent in the nature of some lexical items. Second, they are operations to be carried out not on terms, like definiteness, specificity and others, but on extra-clausal features of the pragmatic context of utterance. Third, they are operations whose scope affects the whole predication. For these reasons it may not be advisable to postulate any operators or satellites of fixed and variable reference. It might be suggested instead that the distinction should be accounted for in the linguistic description by means of a special referential index “v” for variable reference. No index needs to be stated for fixed reference which can be assumed by default when the v-index is not present.

Thus, we could have the following specification of the personal pronoun ‘I’:

$$I(d1x_i: [+S, -A]_v(x_i))$$

Note that the index is attached to the abstract predicate specification of the term variable rather than to the operators. Operators act on the term directly, telling you whether it is specific or generic, singular or plural, etc., thus helping the addressee to bring to mind or identify the right type of referent. In so doing, the operators contribute to the creation of a discourse context. The variable reference index, on the other hand, ties the sense of the expression to the extra-clausal features in such a way that the value of the expression not only determines the context but is determined by it.

6. CONTENT AND CHARACTER

That there is a difference between fixed and variable reference has also been noted in other treatments of deixis. As Levinson (1983:54) has rightly pointed out, the phenomenon of deixis is “the single most obvious way in which the relationship between language and context is reflected in the structure of languages themselves”. In this connection, one of the key features of deictic expressions has usually been considered to be their contingent context-dependent nature. This amounts to stating the variable semantic nature of deictics, in sharp contrast to other linguistic expressions which may be interpreted -although not invariably- as content-bearing and therefore potentially capable of standing on their own.

Kaplan has made a distinction (see Wettstein 1984) between two types of indexical expressions: “pure indexicals” (eg. ‘I’, ‘now’, ‘here’, ‘today’) and “demonstratives” (eg. ‘this’, ‘that’, ‘he’, ‘she’). Both types share their context-sensitive nature, but pure indexicals differ from demonstratives in that their range of variability is regular. Thus, ‘I’, for Kaplan, always refers to what he calls the “agent” of the context, whereas no such regular feature can be expected of ‘that’ in every context. It is apparent that here Kaplan is thinking in terms of Frege’s distinction between sense and denotation, for it is something in the sense of ‘I’ that gives it its “purely indexical” quality. In Kaplan (1978) we find an interesting subdivision of Frege’s notion of sense into “content” and “character”. The content of an expression is determined with respect to a given context of use, whereas the character is “that component of an expression which determines how the content is determined by the context”. Following this line of thinking, it is its “agentive” quality that constitutes the character of ‘I’ and therefore what makes it a pure indexical.

It is apparent therefore that there is a special type of reference associated with pure indexicals. Thus, the uttering of ‘I’ in any context seems to carry with itself a peculiar guarantee of truth, as when I say

(15) I am here now,

in contrast to

(16) Francisco is in Logroño on September 1, 1992.

In uttering (16) I could be lying, but not so in uttering (15).

The character of an expression is set in relation to the features of the context in order to determine the propositional content of the expression. In the case of (15)

different contexts of utterance will result in different contents, which, due to the specific character of the indexicals, will be true of all contexts. Also, in (15) it may be said that the reference is variable, whereas in (16) it is fixed. It is therefore possible to conclude that what Kaplan called the “character” of an expression is accounted for by the variable-reference index proposed above.

7. Restrictors

The description provided by Halliday assigns equal functional status to all the elements of the nominal group, since they belong within the experiential level of grammatical description. This is evident if we observe that the five elements are considered exclusively from the point of view of the way they affect the semantic status of the Thing¹⁴. But that this is not exactly so may be seen from the fact that each of these groups of elements operate differently on the Thing. Thus, Epithets only add properties to the Thing while Deictics and Classifiers act as restrictors on the set of entities denoted by the Thing. The former is a semantic operation of attribution; the latter a pragmatic operation of referentialization, that is, of picking out whatever entities the speaker intends to talk about.

As we have seen, FG accounts for the functional status of the elements of the nominal group at different stages of the construction of the underlying representation of the clause, and consequently of the specification of the SoA. The advantage of this system is to be found in that there is a particularly appealing parallel between the grammatical description and what the speaker can do with the language (the operations mentioned above), which meets pragmatic as well as cognitive standards of adequacy¹⁵. Thus, Classifiers, which tend to restrict the potential class of referents of a term, are considered in FG as open predications -to be completed by the term in question, in the same way as a verbal predication is open for all the terms which may be inserted in the predicate frame. Thus, the underlying representation of the nominal group *the wooden table* and of the sentence *the table is wooden* would be respectively:

(17) $(d1x_i; \text{table}_N(x_i)\emptyset; \text{wooden}_A(x_i)\emptyset)$

(18) $\text{wooden}_A(d1x_i; \text{table}_N(x_i))\emptyset$

where d = definite, 1 = singular and \emptyset = zero semantic function. This underlying similarity is not as explicitly captured by Halliday’s systemic grammar¹⁶. (17) would be read something like “there is a definite singular entity x_i such that the property ‘table’ applies to x_i , such that the property “wooden” applies to x_i . (18) would be interpreted as “a property ‘wooden’ such that this property is applied to x_i , which is a definite singular entity such that the property ‘table’ applies to x_i ”. The difference of treatment lies, therefore, in that for *the wooden table*, “table” is taken to be the basic predication and thus the generator of the predicate frame, whereas in *the table is wooden*, the underlying predicate frame is that corresponding to “wooden”. This treatment captures both the semantic relationship between both structures and their dissimilarities in terms of surface expression.

Epithets do not restrict but signal some quality of the subset of the Thing intended. Thus, ‘old’ in *an old table* would be an Epithet. However, the matter is not as simple as

that. Halliday discusses two sorts of Epithets: experiential Epithets, which are potentially defining (like 'old' in the example above), and interpersonal (attitudinal) Epithets, which are not defining (eg. 'splendid' in *a splendid dress*). Now, the problem this distinction poses is one of properly identifying what the Epithet does on the Thing. For, as a matter of fact, it might be contended that there is, in principle, no clear-cut difference between Epithets and a Classifiers. Both identify a subclass of the Thing or, what is worse, a subset of it. Old tables are a subset of tables -in contrast to new tables, for example. Besides, Classifiers, like Epithets, do specify some quality of the Thing (eg. the quality of being made of wood). Halliday points out two differentiating criteria, though:

(i) Classifiers do not accept degrees of comparison (one can normally say *an older table*, *a more splendid dress* but not **a more wooden table*).

(ii) Classifiers tend to be organized in mutually exclusive sets (a table is either *wooden*, *metal* or *plastic*)¹⁷.

However, it may be objected that whether an adjective can take degrees of comparison or not is both a matter of its intrinsic semantic nature and also of language use. Thus, it is possible to say "more wooden", recategorizing the functional status of the adjective, in a context in which, say, we have a table which is a mixture of materials and we want to mean that there is more of wood than of plastic or metal. The resulting expression would be highly marked, with its corresponding pragmatic effect.

In FG, the functional status of an expression as either Epithet or Classifier is not differentiated. This is probably due to the fact that, as we have pointed out, both narrow down the set of potential referents of a term. However, since they have different functional status some provision should be made for the difference either in underlying term structure or in the predication. Here we might suggest, in consonance with the spirit of the FG framework, that only Epithets should be treated as restricting predications (open in x_i), and that Classifiers should be treated as a special type of explicit selection restriction. Thus, nominal groups containing a Classifier+ Thing (or Head in Dik's terms) would have to be analyzed as consisting of a complex term structure of which the restrictor is an explicit selection restriction. This agrees with Dik's position that selectional predicates must be predicates of the object language and also with the idea that a selection restriction entails a (lexical) presupposition ("bachelor", in one of its meanings, presupposes "male" and "unmarried"). A presupposition is but a covert statement that something is the case in some world; it is something which is taken for granted about the meaning of an expression just by uttering it. Thus, saying *John is an unmarried man* makes explicit part of what saying *John is a bachelor* presupposes. Also, this idea is further supported by the fact that a single non-complex term may codify a Classifier: "bachelor" codifies the Classifier "unmarried".

8. Final remarks

From the preceding discussion the reader will have noticed that FG has been conceived in such a way that it achieves both pragmatic and psychological adequacy, as

well as a large degree of descriptive generalization which is absent from other grammatical theories like SFG. However, its descriptive apparatus at its present state of formulation is incapable of accounting for certain functionally relevant grammatical notions, like the ones which we have treated above with reference to the nominal group.

It must be noted that the solutions sketched above are tentative proposals intended to improve the descriptive adequacy of term structure, and that the basic nature of the predicate frame and of the specification of terms is left undisturbed. Indeed, we have tried to argue that the FG framework is powerful and one which meets the requirements of modern pragmatic theories based on the study of the relationship between communication and cognition, like Sperber and Wilson's (1986). That this is so is evident from the possibility of treating certain essentially referential operations (like construal, identification, attribution and restriction) as cognitive in nature.

Notes

1. In this we follow the convention, used by Halliday, of writing functional categories with capital letters to distinguish them from class labels (like verb, adjective, noun).
2. In his discussion of his notion of "communicative competence" Hymes (1979) distinguishes four "sectors" in it: "grammaticality", "feasibility", "appropriateness" and "occurrence". Feasibility, which has to do with performance (coding/decoding) limitations, and occurrence (the feeling that one would never say that) would probably be at stake here.
3. By context of utterance we understand the whole set of beliefs and knowledge which the speaker has and uses, together with situational features, in making sense of linguistic expressions. See the definition of "pragmatic information" in section #2.
4. As an illustration of what a radical formal account of language does, we might think of the difference between explaining some part of an engine in terms of some of its properties, such as its shape, weight, colour, texture, where it is placed, where it cannot fit, etc., but then not knowing what it does within the engine. A functional account of language attempts to understand the properties of linguistic components in relation to their function.
5. The common-sense view that formalism and functionalism are complementary rather than opposing views can be found in Leech (1983), although no convincing argument is offered to substantiate the claim. Transformational formalism has tended to consider language as a mental phenomenon, which explains why describing a grammar has been considered similar to describing a speaker's competence. Halliday's linguistics, on the other hand, rejects the notion of competence as subjective and prefers to talk about the more objective notion of "meaning potential" (Halliday 1978:38), that is, the range of options which are available for the speaker to choose and mean. Halliday does not say that the notion of competence is misconceived but only that it is irrelevant for linguistic theory, which deals with facts about the system itself. However, one might object that it is a fact of any linguistic system that it exhibits not only a meaning potential but what we may call -more appropriately- a "use potential". This notion combines insights from mentalism and functionalism in that the linguistic expression is considered from the point of view of what the speaker knows he can do with it in order to make meaning and in terms of the options provided by the system. The notion can be easily inserted within the FG philosophical framework for it is related to both standards of pragmatic and psychological adequacy.

6. In fact, Dik (1989:111) talks of “potential” and “intended” reference. However, we have chosen to avoid the latter term since it misses the resultative aspect of reference. Besides that, talking of actual reference involves both the addresser and the addressee, whereas intended reference is related only to the addresser. Actual reference is achieved in communication as a result of the negotiation of intentions between addresser and addressee.
7. Here Rosch’s (1973) well-known theory of prototypes may be relevant. Although tentatively, one might suggest that a prototype, which is defined as the best example of a category, constitutes an adequate mental standard for establishing the extension of a term. For a study on the role of prototypes in linguistic theory, see Taylor (1989).
8. See #5 below for further remarks concerning the role of term operators in FG.
9. S stands for “speaker” and A for “addressee”; see Dik (1989:144).
10. In Ruiz de Mendoza (1992) it is suggested that construal and identification should be treated as closely interdependent cognitive operations, the former always preceding, from a cognitive point of view, the latter. We cannot identify a referent which has not been constructed in our minds first; that is why it is possible for speakers to use the interrelationship between both operations with some pragmatic value. In the case of (8), in the context given, the speaker gets to the hearer to make a mental representation of any mouse and then to treat it as identifiable. This may have some predictable pragmatic consequences: the hearer may either accept or refuse to pretend he can identify the referent. If he accepts to do it, since the referent was not actually available, the definite article will have a generic value for the hearer even though he assumes that the intended referent was specific. We can generalize over this fact by stating that whenever a definite term is used communicatively with the intention of getting the hearer to first construe and then identify a referent for the term, the term will have a generic operator in its underlying description. If, on the other hand, the definite term is used in the unmarked way, it will be taken to be specific.
11. Dik uses the term “Possible Fact” rather than simply “Fact” in order to account for cases in which it is either denied or presupposed that a third order entity has factual status: eg. *It is not true that the Germans collapsed completely; If the Germans had collapsed completely...* (Dik 1989:250).
12. See “On sense and reference”, in Black & Geach (1960). Here I will follow the critical summary in Perry (1977).
13. “e” in e_i stands for “event” as distinct from first order entities (x_i). Consider the ambiguity of *John saw the painting of a monk*, where the expression *the painting* may be referring either to a physical object or to an activity. This ambiguity is intended by Dik to be captured by the different variables (Dik 1989:199).
14. Thus the Deictic “indicates whether or not some specific subset of the Thing is intended” (Halliday 1985:160). The Post-deictic “adds further to the identification of the subset in question” by referring to “its fame or familiarity, its status in the text, or its similarity/dissimilarity to some other designated subset” (1985:162). The Numerative indicates some numerical feature of the subset, the Epithet some quality, and the Classifier a subclass of the Thing, which is the semantic core of the nominal group.
15. This parallel has certain philosophical consequences for a theory of pragmatics which attempts cognitive relevance. May it suffice to call attention to the fact that the criterion of pragmatic adequacy, which Dik advocates for his FG (Dik 1989:12), is sustained by the treatment of some aspects of reference as (pragmatic) operations on terms at the earliest stage of predication. It seems natural to think that the pragmatic operations on terms are done at the same time as terms are selected. Thus, in language use we do not think of, say, the concept

- “table” but rather of “a table”, “this table”, “the table” or “tables”. However, we do not find any explicit claim, in Dik’s work, that the speaker proceeds in the way here suggested. This might be the concern of either cognitive psychologists or pragmaticists.
16. It is interesting to note, however, that the present analysis, inspired by FG, is consistent with the systemic notion of “option” if we build pragmatics into the picture. Thus, the range of variability between the different options available to the speaker in order to express one same or related predications is to be studied as a matter of pragmatic meaning. Probably, as it is suggested by Butler (1988), systemic linguists would do well to take pragmatics into account.
17. Being a Classifier or an Epithet, for Halliday, is a matter of function within the noun group. For example, one same adjective can function both as a Classifier and as an Epithet, like “fast” in *fast train*, which may refer, as a Classifier, to those trains classified as expresses or, as an Epithet, to a train that goes fast.

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