Chapter 15
Referring

Practically all utterances are in a frame of reference for which the speaker's ego provides a center of gravity. Since language invariably involves interpersonal instruction, it is always blended with deixis (Hörmann, 1981, p. 307).

Chapter Prospectus

Chapter 15, *Referring*, calls the reader's attention to a number of indicators that speakers use to refer a listener to someone or somewhere or sometime (e.g., all three, as in *Jose* went *there in June*). We have used the generic term *referring* so as to include in this chapter discussions of deixis, anaphora (frequently a pronominal substitution for a preceding word or phrase), naming, and other forms of designation of objects, places, or persons in the environment or under discussion in spoken discourse. Deixis need not be verbal at all; pointing or even direction of gaze often suffices. Pronominal reference allows of much stylistic variation in choosing person (e.g., *you* do it this way or *one* does it this way) and number (e.g., *I* or an editorial *we*). We review empirical research on the implications of references in various settings (in particular, political). These research examples will especially clarify the importance of referring as an expression of the dialogical perspective of the speaker. The conscious ego of the speaker is at the center of all referring as *origo*.

Referring

Our old friend *Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary* (11th ed., 2003, p. 1045) offers the following definition of *refer*, as intended in the present chapter: "**~** *vi* **1. . . b :** to direct attention usu. by clear and specific mention <no one *referred* to yesterday's quarrel>." Or, as *Collins cobuild advanced learner's English dictionary* (2003, p. 1204) puts it: "If you **refer to** a particular subject or person, you talk about them or mention them." The term *indexical* is also used with respect to the action of referring. *Merriam-Webster's* (p. 633) definition of indexical is:

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"**2 a :** varying in reference with the individual speaker <the ~ words *I, here, now*> **b :** associated with or identifying an individual speaker <~ features of speech>." Accordingly, it is the *index* finger with which one points. In fact, a great deal of the referring in spontaneous spoken discourse is of a nonverbal nature. The pursing or protruding of the lips is yet another nonverbal means of pointing; it is widespread in Central and South America, Africa, and the Philippines. An additional way of pointing nonverbally is with the eyes, either by gaze coupling (looking at each other) or mutual gaze (together looking at the same person or object). One may note that our usage of *referring* always implies a speaker in a concrete setting; however, both speaker and listener may refer – either verbally or nonverbally.

Harley (2001, p. 423) has presented the concepts of *reference* and *referent* that are characteristic of mainstream psycholinguistics: The notions are subsumed under the general area of meaning and semantics – abstractly and without advertence to a speaker, although in his section on comprehension, he has indeed adverted to the listener (p. 322). Dietrich (2002, p. 135) has applied the term "**referentielle Besetzung**" (referential determination) to the speaker's role, but still within the context of theoretical semantics.

For purposes of empirical research, how a speaker refers makes a difference. The *hey-you-there* mode of address is very far removed from the *excuse-me-Ms.* style in a number of dimensions, all of which reflect the dialogical perspective of the speaker. Needless to say, the former example shows little respect; the latter, even though it addresses a second-personal entity, uses a first-personal pronoun. The fixing of the intended object or addressee is quite characteristic of spontaneous spoken discourse. Even when the discourse is relatively abstract, one speaks to the interlocutor, e.g., of *your* principle, or with reference to a third party's involvement as *her* intentions. Referring thus becomes an important means of anchoring the discourse to the here and now.

Deixis

In a more technical, linguistic context, Crystal (1997) has this to say of the concept of *deixis*:

> Every language has a set of lexemes which can be interpreted only with reference to the speaker's position in space or time. These are known as deictic forms (from the Greek word for 'pointing'), and the conditions governing their use have attracted especial attention in recent semantics. They fall into three main types.

- *Personal deixis* The use of pronouns, such as *I* and *you*, which identify who is taking part in the discourse.
- *Spatial deixis* Forms that distinguish the position of the speaker in relation to other people or objects, such as *this* / *that, here* / *there* (p. 99), *bring* / *take, come* / *go*. *Come*, for example, implies direction towards the speaker – *Come here*! (but not **Go here*!).

- *Temporal deixis* Forms that distinguish time with respect to the speaker, such as *now, yesterday, then*, and the various kinds of tense marker.

These are all familiar, commonsensible relationships that speakers and listeners use frequently in everyday life. One might add the use of proper names and roles (e.g., secretary of state and the labor negotiator) as methods of referring to people. But it should be noted additionally that Crystal has referred to "the speaker's position in space or time." The context, then, is spoken discourse, and the fact of the matter is that *I* is always in this setting the *origo* or central point of the universe from which all else radiates – what the classical Greek phrase 'όμφαλος της γης, the navel of the world, intends. William James (1891/1981, p. 278) has called attention to the underlying psychology of *me*:

> The altogether unique kind of interest which each human mind feels in those parts of creation which it can call *me* or *mine* may be a moral riddle, but it is a fundamental psychological fact. No mind can take the same interest in his neighbor's *me* as in his own. The neighbor's me falls together with all the rest of things in one foreign mass, against which his own *me* stands out in startling relief.

The relevance of James's generalization is that referring is always perspectivized in terms of this primacy and centrality of *me* and what is *mine*, as set off from others. It is always *my* perspective from which I set out, as we shall discuss in detail in Chapter 20 under the topic of *having a perspective*. And if, along the way, I adopt or take another's perspective, it is either because it is found to be in accord with mine or because I am trying it on, so to speak, taking the perspective of another tentatively, or for the sake of argument, or to be civil. This *taking, setting*, or *assuming* another's perspective is ordinarily not quite as definitive as it might seem to either interlocutors or analysts; instead it sometimes remains quite tentative and/or superficial. The cunning second-hand-car dealer may not be taking your perspective at all; he is simply professing his "Irish" because he noted your name and saw the shamrock in your lapel. Citation is an additional case of explicitly taking another's perspective, as we have noted in Chapter 9. And as we noted there, the spoken enactment of the written conventions for indicating this shift in perspective is not without subtle risks.

In a similar vein, Karl Bühler (1990, p. 117) has emphasized the speaker as the center or "origin" of the referential field, which is defined by the here, the now, and the I or ego. Hörmann (1981, p. 242) has summarized Bühler's argument as follows:

> The groundwork of language communication is constituted neither by the lexicon as a register of symbolic designations for things, nor by any set of rules for stringing together these designations, but by the ego engaged in an incessant confrontation with a world of human beings.

This anchoring "in the conscious ego as the *origo* of the phenomenal field," at the intersection of *me*/*here*/*now*, is reflected in deictic words, which "are

expedient ways to guide the partners" (Bühler, 1990, p. 121). Thus, the unitary self-consciousness of the speaker constitutes the center of the communicative space from which referring emanates (Hörmann, 1981, p. 115; see also Wunderlich, 1972, p. 81).

Laughter as a Nonverbal Self-reference

It could well be argued that *emotional expressions* reflect especially well the primacy and centrality of the *me*. Edmondson (1987, p. 29 f.) has emphasized in this regard that laughter is "both personal and relational," and that "it belongs to the general domain of the pronominal." Thus, laughter is shown to be self-revelatory: "The first person pronoun is an inevitable core of what it means to laugh." And yet, revealing as laughter might be of the ego, it can be potentially very ambiguous, as "in neutral, noncommittal, tentative or interrogative laughter." Furthermore, Edmondson has maintained that laughter is "distinguishable from other paralinguistic pronominal declarations, such as cries of grief and pain by its sociability: it is a direct appeal for mutuality." Accordingly, he has distanced laughter from "the autism of weeping, surprise, expletive and command" and has aligned it instead with

> the interjections of cheering and booing, of socially shared joy and anger. Laugh and the world laughs with you – for to laugh alone (or to be the sole non-laugher in a group) is a form of temporary ostracism with immediate person significance.

All this self-referential function of laughter adds up to the implication that it is "a declaration of individuality, possibly the most individualized of the human uses of sound." In any event, laughter certainly must be acknowledged to be strongly personally perspectivized.

Some Recent Research on Referring

In a recent volume edited by Enfield and Stivers (2007), *Person reference in interaction: Linguistic, cultural, and social perspectives*, Stivers, Enfield, and Levinson (2007) have reviewed the literature and "universal principles that govern this domain" (p. 2). They have also characterized the research in the book as emphasizing a central issue: the question "why some particular mode of reference rather than another has been chosen" (p. 6) in various empirical situations. Unmarked referring to persons is accomplished in English with an individual's name, whereas through marked referring, "speakers perform actions relative to the culture in which they operate. . . . It is the departure from the unmarked form that conveys that the speaker is doing something special with the action" (p. 18). For example, *Colin Powell* would be an unmarked reference to the former secretary of state of the United States; *Secretary Powell* would be a marked reference. In short, the empirical projects reported in this

book indicate that referring is not just "about giving and receiving information but about navigating social relations" (p. 19).

In Chapter 5, we have presented empirical evidence for a shift toward a more conversational style in U.S. presidential inaugurals of the late nineteenth century through the use of various rhetorical devices (Kowal et al., 1997). Thus, a shift in the use of first-person pronominals from the dominant use of the singular *I* to the plural *we* can now be seen in a more specific light: It reflects a shift in referential perspective to a more informal public self-presentation on the part of the presidents themselves.

More recently, Suleiman and her colleagues have engaged referring in the context of political discourse, particularly in the context of the Middle East conflict. Suleiman and O'Connell (2003, p. 419) have found considerable differences in the way in which Colin Powell, in a TV interview with Larry King, has referred to parties involved in the Middle East: "Powell's discourse divided the world into 'us' – the USA and its allies (Russia and Israel) – and 'them' (Iraq, Palestine, and Terrorists)." Atkinson (1985, p. 167) too has called attention to the use of *us* and *them* in the rhetoric of political speeches. He has found the use of *us* and *them* one of the most frequent rhetorical contrasts to effectively elicit audience applause (see also our Chapter 18).

Suleiman, Lucas, Blum-Kulka, Kampf, and Liebes (2001, September) have observed notable differences in the way in which the CNN and BBC television networks have reported events in the Middle East in terms of amount of coverage. More specifically, in referring to the intifada during October 2000, CNN afforded Israelis more TV time: "Across all categories of measurement – appearance, turns, number of individuals – Israelis predominated." Suleiman et al. have inferred perspectival imbalance from the imbalance of time coverage. They have found no such imbalance in the BBC coverage. More recently, Suleiman and O'Connell (2007) have pointed out Bill Clinton's perspective in media interviews, as shown in his way of referring to the Israeli and Palestinian points of view by designating them with first-personal and third-personal pronominals, respectively. Again, the *we* and *they* mentality prevailed – good guys and bad guys. Finally, notable differences in the way in which Hillary and Bill Clinton referred to their interviewers in their media interviews (Suleiman & O'Connell, 2008) have been found. Hillary Clinton addressed all five of her interviewers (male and female alike) with their first name, whereas Bill Clinton addressed none of his interviewers in this manner. It worked the other way around too: None of the interviewers addressed Bill Clinton with his first name. However, Hillary Clinton was addressed with her first name by three of her five interviewers.

These findings can be considered in light of a broader research context. In general, women have been found to use language more properly than men in keeping with the occasion (e.g., Labov, 1972; see also Bourdieu, 1991). It may be that Hillary Clinton simply wished to build camaraderie with her interviewers. Along these lines, Cohen (1987, p. 122 f.; see also Suleiman & O'Connell, 2007) has observed that interviewees use first names with their

interviewers rhetorically to give the illusion that they are closer in position or perspective to the interviewers than they really are. One American journalist reported to Cohen regarding interviewees' use of first names: "Sometimes people try to rub off against your credibility by showing some intimacy that is simply not there." But as for the interviewer's use of the first name of the interviewee, British reporters viewed the practice as destroying "the distance that an interviewer should have from an interviewee" and as implying "an over-familiarity between the interviewer and the respondent."

Referring is clearly not a neutral tool, but instead serves as a revelation of the speaker's perspective toward the person or institution or object of his or her discourse. Wagner, Kako, Amick, Carrigan, and Liu (2005, p. 639) have summarized the functioning of anaphora in spoken discourse as follows: "Discourse anaphora is rule-governed, but the rules make reference to more than just linguistic structures." The relationship between a news interviewer and a political interviewee is typically a very sensitive and subtle one. The way they refer to one another can therefore be very revealing. Perhaps that is why one German reporter replied – when Cohen (1987, p. 122 f.) suggested that interviewers do indeed sometimes use an interviewer's first name – with an emphatic and incredulous: "What?! Me?! Never!!!" The cultural differences between American and European reporters in this regard have been pinpointed in Cohen's final statement to the effect that the consternation at his suggestion "was unreservedly shared by all the reporters I spoke to in Germany," whereas he found the least objections to the practice among American reporters.

The empirical findings of Suleiman and her colleagues have clearly added substantive evidence for Enfield's (2007, p. 119) generalization: "Formulations of person reference in any language system . . . make publicly overt and thereby instantiate and stabilize cultural values about persons and their social relations."

The unavoidable usage of perspectivized personal reference in spoken discourse can also be considered in view of Clayman and Heritage's (2002) claim that public news interviewers remain professionally neutral with respect to their interviewees. In light of the ubiquity of perspectival reference to interlocutors, such neutrality seems implausible (see also O'Connell & Kowal, 2006b, p. 163).