Popular scientific abstract

The project „Polysemous theory of proper names" fits into a certain stream of research within philosophy of language as well as theoretical linguistics. It aims to propose an original semantic theory of proper names which are perceived as a linguistic type of expressions (e.g. John Smith or Mount Everest). Expressions of this type are widely believed as referring to individual objects (the particular person or mountain accordingly). The way in which those objects are referred to remained a subject of the historical debate, in which Gottlob Frege suggested that an object (*Bedeuting*) is designated by an identifying condition enclosed in the sense (*Sinn*) of the proper name. By contrast, supporters of direct reference semantics (like David Kaplan in his 1989 article „Demonstartives") suggested that an object is rather referred to directly (without any mediation of the Fregean „Sinn"), solely via social convention that binds the name with its subject in an act of naming.

Both, descriptivists (those who agree with Frege's ideas), as well as supporters of direct reference semantics, have something in common. Namely, they focus heavily on the referential function of proper names, i.e. that they serve as a mean of referring to individual objects. Meanwhile, contemporarily, i.a. Tyler Burge, indicated that there are also non-referential kinds of proper names uses. Proper names can take the plural form ("There are relatively few Alfreds in Princeton"), take indefinite or definite articles ("An Alfred Russell joined the club today", "The Alfred who joined the club today was a baboon") or be quantified („Some Alfreds are crazy; some are sane").

Despite the fact that such non-referential uses of proper names seem undoubtedly grammatically correct and may result in some interesting linguistic phenomena, for a long time they remained vastly ignored by philosophers as well as theoretical linguists. It was only the beginning of XXI century when predicativists (e.g. Ora Matushansky, Delia Graff Fara), following Tyler Burge, started to defend an idea that proper names are, in fact, predicates in all their appearances (corresponding to referential as well as non-referential uses). As a consequence, they postulate existence of a single semantic mechanism for proper names, common for both: referential and non-referential uses.

Within this project semantics rival to predicativists theory is to be proposed. A single semantic mechanism is to be replaced by a set of mechanisms corresponding to various kinds of proper names uses. As a result, the main aim of the project consists in an attempt to develop a polysemous theory of proper names (which was originally proposed by Gail Leckie). This theory, in contrast to a theory defended by predicativists, allows for preserving certain referential intuitions concerning normal uses of proper names (i.e. referring to individual objects). Development of such a theory will consist in suggesting semantic mechanisms for all the identified kinds of uses of proper names.