

## **Project "Theory of linguistic reference based on the notion of salience" description for the general public**

One of the important questions asked by the researchers who study language is how words refer to objects in the world; in particular, what kind of a relation between a singular referring term (such as the name "Mount Everest" or description "the present Queen of England") and a unique object or person makes it the case that this term *represents* exactly that thing or person. In response to this question, most philosophers of language assume that the link between the object and the term, as used on a given occasion, is homogeneous, namely, it can be reduced to one particular type of connection. For example, it is claimed that the referent of a given expression is the individual who uniquely satisfies certain descriptive conditions associated by competent speakers with that expression, or — to take a different view — that the referent is the individual that stays at the beginning of a "chain" of usages of the expression, which includes some causal connections. At the same time, it is often assumed that the nature of reference depends on the kind of the expression (e.g., the fact whether we have an indexical expression or not) and so it is different in the case of proper names and, for instance, demonstrative phrases; some even postulate the existence of two (or more) distinct mechanisms of reference among the expressions of one category.

The project "Theory of linguistic reference based on the notion of salience" aims to contribute to the above discussion on the concept of singular reference and develop an original theory of reference which states that the referent of a term used in a context is, roughly speaking, the object which (i) satisfies the descriptive conditions expressed by the term, (ii) is the most *salient* object, according to a contextually established ranking of salience. The author of the project will apply this proposal particularly to complex demonstrative expressions such as "this man", "the high mountain", "that black dog" — the ones which contain both the demonstrative and the descriptive element. Firstly, we will make a detailed and systematic analysis of the category of salience (which is loosely characterized in the philosophical literature) in the interdisciplinary way: we will conduct theoretical investigations as well as experimental research involving ordinary speakers of language. Secondly, in line with the dominant approach in contemporary analytical philosophy, we will formulate our ideas in a scientific and possibly precise way using the selected tools of logic. The final stage of the project will be to provide a formalized semantic theory based on a notion of salience which accounts for the meanings of complex demonstratives; at this stage, we will also consider whether the proposed account can be applied to other referring terms.

The proposal of a reference theory based on salience is motivated by the belief of the author that the salience-approach — when sufficiently developed — is capable of providing a general explanation of the relation of singular reference. The originality of this approach rests on abandoning the assumption that singular reference must be reducible to one type of a relation or a simple ambiguity. In light of the fact that an individual may become (the most) salient due to a variety of factors and because of its different features, the proposed approach implies a kind of pluralism of reference. Thanks to this pluralistic account one can try to explain the mechanism of reference of different expressions in different uses, yet being committed to one theory. Creating a universal theory of singular reference would be an essential contribution to the theoretical linguistics and the philosophy of language.