

Categorial Terms and Reference Borrowing

In a reference theory a distinction can be made between a theory of reference fixing and a theory of reference borrowing. According to a purely causal theory of reference borrowing, like Kripke's, the reference of terms – proper names and natural kind terms – as used by borrowers is exclusively determined by the membership of those uses into causal chains regardless of the descriptions or properties they could associate with the terms. M. Devitt and K. Sterelny in (1999) [*Language and Reality*: Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2nd revised and enlarged edition] have supported a descriptive-causal theory of the reference fixing for proper names and natural kind terms, but they have advocated a purely causal theory of their reference borrowing.

The reason why these authors hold a descriptive-causal theory of the reference fixing is that the ostensive reference fixing involves the introducers of a term in the *qua* problem, i.e., in the problem of the disambiguation of the reference, and the resolution of this problem requires the recourse to descriptive components.

After briefly exposing the main elements of Devitt's and Sterelny's descriptive-causal theory of reference fixing I will focus on their reference borrowing theory. In this regard the question arises as to whether a borrower's linguistic competence with a word is compatible with large ignorance or error about its referent, and in case he is required to know very little about the referent, what is the descriptive element that the competent borrower has to associate with the term. My proposal will be that the descriptive element required will be at least some categorial term – and hence the indefinite description formed with it – which is true or approximately true of the referred entity, where by a categorial term should be understood a general term that conveys a criterion of identity. In this paper I will deal with the borrowing reference of both, proper names and natural kind terms.

On putting forward my proposal I will take into consideration the views of some authors who have not rejected or even have explicitly admitted that there are descriptive requirements in a reference borrowing theory.

In this regard it is noteworthy that K. Donnellan, one of the main advocates of the historical-causal theory, does not question the necessity to incorporate descriptive elements in a borrowing reference theory for proper names, whose claims should extend likewise to that sort of theory concerning natural kind terms. Donnellan is willing to concede that it is a necessary condition – although not a sufficient one – for an entity to be the referent of a term as used by the borrowers, that such entity satisfy some description that they associate with the term, and in this regard he mentions an indefinite description formed with a categorial term.

Another advocate of the causal theory, in this case of a social-causal theory, namely, H. Putnam, supports more definitely the requirement that the borrower must associate some descriptive elements with the borrowed term. Putnam claims that all competent speakers concerning a natural kind term will have to associate with it the syntactic markers, the semantic markers and the stereotype of the term. Out of these properties the most relevant to this talk are the last two, although Putnam concedes concerning some natural kind terms that the stereotype may coincide with the semantic markers. In the cases in which the stereotype is different from the semantic markers, the main feature to distinguish the second properties from the first ones is that the semantic markers are "category-indicators of high centrality" and hardly revisable. According to Putnam both sorts of properties, expressed by categorial terms, and mainly the semantic markers must be associated with the term for the speaker to be competent concerning

that term. And this claim also applies to the reference borrowers, as far as they are a sort of competent speakers.

Although Devitt and Sterelny in (1999) have questioned the necessity of including descriptive elements in a theory of reference borrowing, it is noteworthy that in later works, Devitt, somewhat reluctantly, concedes that the reference borrowing may include some small descriptive elements, but he avoids entering into this question.

According to the assertions by Donnellan, Putnam, and more hesitantly by Devitt – despite Devitt's and Sterelny's asseverations in (1999) to the contrary – I claim that it is plausible that borrowers will have to associate some descriptive element which applies, or at least approximately applies, to the referent of the terms, proper names and natural kind terms, which they borrow, and that the minimum descriptive element is very general, i.e., some categorial term that expresses the type of entity referred to. If the speaker is completely ignorant or wrong about that type of entity, the borrower's competent speaker status can be questioned. In this regard speakers can be divided into different sorts. On the one hand, the introducers of a term, who associate different descriptions with the term to sort out the *qua* problem concerning proper names and natural kind terms; on the other hand, the borrowers of the term, who associate with the term at least some categorial term that is true – or approximately true – of the referred entity. Lastly, those speakers who are completely ignorant or absolutely wrong regarding the properties, even the most general ones, possessed by the referent of the term. Only the first two sorts of speakers are competent. Concerning the latter it could be claimed that it is doubtful they have really borrowed the reference of the term, or it could be said regarding them that even if they were to refer by the use of a term to an entity, they would have no idea about the sort of entity they refer to and so in this sense they would have no idea of what they refer to.

Thus, my conclusion is that causal theorists should hold a descriptive-causal theory of reference borrowing, which includes, in addition to causal chains, at least some categorial term which is true or approximately true of the referred entity.