

# Reference



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Definition: One of the most prominent issues in the field of pragmatics is that of **reference**– the question of what it is that a speaker is speaking of when they use an expression that, broadly speaking, picks out some entity.

Referring Expression:

it's a linguistic expression that a speaker uses in order to enable an addressee to “pick out” something in the world. This is the sort of definition raises questions.

-what it means to “pick up”? “something”

-Two different views:

Mentalist Vs. Referential( discourse model Vs. real world )

**referring expression : is a linguistic form that the speaker uses with the intention that it correspond to some discourse entity and bring that discourse entity to mind for the addressee**

Sense( invariant, Semantics)Vs. Reference(determined by contextual factors, pragmatics)



**A referring expression**, then, is a linguistic expression that a speaker uses in referring to something. The thing referred to is called the **referent**. **In a mentalist framework**, the referent is a discourse entity – something that exists within a **discourse model**, which in turn exists only within the minds of interlocutors. In a referential framework, on the other hand, the referent is an entity in the real world

There are problems with both views:

**Carla is tall**, *I certainly don't intend to say that something in my mind is tall*; clearly my intention as a speaker is to indicate something in the world

**-The woman in the corner**

the referent needn't exist in the world

at all; I can easily refer to fictional, imaginary, and nonexistent entities.

-as long as my addressee shares my belief, the reference will go through flawlessly, despite there being nothing in the world satisfying the reference.



-It seems clear that the correct analysis will ultimately need to take something from both **mentalism** and **referentialism**, acknowledging the speaker's intention to refer to something outside their own mind (most of the time, anyway) while nonetheless **relativizing** reference to the speaker's beliefs.

-It is difficult to delimit what can and cannot be considered a referring expression:

**Cases:**

Clear cases: my *father* is....

Less clear cases:

- a. *The tiger is a dangerous creature.*( refers to a class) •
- b. *If you can't come, that will be a shame.*(refers to a proposition, you can't come)
- c. *Barbara's sincerity is really touching.*(the referent is abstract but •
- d. *I can't decide what to eat.*(less clear •
- e. *Yesterday was beautiful.* •
- f. *I saw my cousin yesterday.* •
- g. *It's warm today.* •
- h. *It's John who's spreading the rumor.* •



-Referring expressions, then, come in a wide variety of subclasses, and the boundaries of the category as a whole are not clear. Most referring expressions are noun phrases of various types (including proper nouns and pronouns), but one could also argue that a word like *there* (as in, *Put the lunchmeat over there*), which functions as a prepositional phrase, nonetheless takes a particular place as a referent.