Book and article reviews

PDF erstellt am: **11.10.2021**

C. Cecchetto, G. Chierchia, M.T.AA.VV., *Semantic Interfaces [Reference, Anaphora and Aspect]*. Guasti ed., Stanford: CSLI 2001, 361 pp.

The intriguing title of this collection of essays, composed to celebrate Andrea Bonomi's 60th birthday, clearly manifests the halfway nature (between linguistics and philosophy of language) of the contents it introduces the reader to.

It has been largely acknowledged that the specific nature of the philosophy of language discipline is the investigation of the semantic issue in language, whilst linguistics would rather concentrate on the structural side of the problem, on the "signifiant", to use the well-known Saussurian category. The syntagm "semantic interfaces" therefore provocatively combines two different research fields, inviting attention to both sides of the semiotic relation: the sign vehicle and the referent.

The problem of reference has always been crucial for the philosophy of language; it raises big questions, such as: "what link is there between discourse and reality? Between words and things?" The answers – given or future – depend on the general philosophical frame in which every philosopher locates himself; in any case, what remains is the approach to language conceived and analysed as a "vehicle" to something which is "further" than it.

As regards the linguistic phenomenon of the anaphora, of which the classical grammarians were already well aware (in fact, the word comes from the Greek verb *ana-phero*, which means "to raise", "to recall", "to bring back"), it raises both structural problems (What kind of linguistic element can serve as

antecedent to each type of anaphoric element?) and semantic issues (Are the anaphoric expression and its antecedent co-referent or not? What kind of inference does the antecedent trigger when it is semantically different from the anaphoric term?). As regards the former, one of the most influential approaches is the so-called "Binding theory" by Chomsky (Chomsky, *Lectures on Government and Binding*, Foris, Dordrecht 1981); as regards the latter, many scholars could be mentioned: for an introduction and some basic insights, the reader can refer to J. Lyons, *Semantics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1994 (1977◊), v. II, pp. 636-718.

What is anaphora? The anaphoric "scenario" consists of an element or construction which depends, for its correct interpretation, on being associated with another element in the cotext, more precisely, in the preceding cotext (when an element refers to the text "forward" we should speak of "cataphora" rather than of anaphora; see. K. Bühler, *Sprachtheorie, Die Darstellungfunktion der Sprache*, Gustav Fischer Verlag, Jena 1934). There are many different kinds of anaphora and many possible taxonomies. From a semantic point of view, we can distinguish two basic anaphoric phenomena: those cases in which the anaphoric element is said to be co-referential with its antecedent ("Thanks for the book! I will start reading *it* as soon as possible), and those cases (called "associative" anaphora), in which the antecedent is semantically different from the anaphoric expression, and it works as a "trigger" by conjuring up a set of semantic associations that help find the intended referent ("Yesterday I went to *a wedding*; *the bride* was very beautiful"; see J.

Hawkins, *Definiteness and Indefiniteness*, Croom Helm, London 1978).

The eight papers contained in this book address specific insights into the problem of how meaning and form are related; basically, they can be divided into two groups: some deals with the theme of reference and anaphora, others with that of tense and aspect, in which again the notion of anaphora can be found. To the first group belong the contributions of: Robert May (*Frege on Identity Statements*, dealing with what is known as "Frege's puzzle": if the identity symbol is a sign of objectual identity, how can it carry non-trivial information?), Gennaro Chierchia (*A puzzle about indefinites*, in which the author analyses the referential value of indefinites), Carlo Cecchetto (*Syntactic or semantic reconstruction? Evidence from Pseudoclefts and Clitic left Dislocation*; a discussion on anaphora and the theory of reconstruction), Luigi Rizzi (*Reconstruction, Weak Island Sensitivity, and Agreement*, again dealing with the reconstruction theory). To the second group belong the contributions of: Pier Marco Bertinetto (*On a Frequent Misunderstanding in the Temporal-Aspectual Domain: The 'Perfective-Telic Confusion*, where the notions of Actionality and Aspect are discussed as independent categories), Alessandra Giorgi and Fabio Pianesi (*Ways of terminating*, whose topic again is that of telicity / atelicity of predicates), Arnim Von Stechow (*Temporally Opaque Arguments in Verbs of Creation*, in which the author argues that verbs of creation share referential "opacity" with verbs like "seek" or "owe", in that their relevant object doesn't actually exist), Sandro Zucchi (*Tense in Fiction*, on the "floatation" of the temporal point of origin in fictional texts). As it is impos-

sible to enter into the details of all the above mentioned papers, given the richness and complexity of their respective contents, I shall now focus attention on two of them, one taken from the first group, the other from the second.

Robert May's contribution, entitled *Frege on Identity Statements*, deals with one of the most puzzling questions raised by the great philosopher and mathematician: under what conditions can identity statements be informative? The problem is to combine their logical and semantic aspects: if, on the one hand, as he states in his *Begriffsschrift*, one could object to the introduction of a symbol for identity in a formal language that, if A and B have the same content, there is no reason for such a symbol, on the other we must recognize that there's a difference "between there being identity of content and *expressing* identity of content in the conceptual notation". In other words, "the matter pertains *both* to expressions *and* to thought"; for a given content, having different names is not merely a matter of form, but, "if they are associated with different modes of determination, they concern the very heart of the matter" (p. 12). Contents may be "given" in more than one way. In *Über Sinn und Bedeutung*, Frege clarifies that the additional value contained in a=b (with respect to a=a, given the truth of both equations), is a cognitive value. The truth of a=a is known, as Kant would say, *a priori*; the truth of a=b can be stated only after ascertaining that, though having a different sense ("Sinn"), they share the same referent ("Bedeutung"); "because of this, «a=b» has greater cognitive value than «a=a» and must express a different thought" (p. 32). In Frege's view, as we find it expressed at the end of the already men-

tioned *Über Sinn und Bedeutung,* the sense of an identity statement, that is, the thought it expresses, appears to be no less relevant than its reference.

In his paper Pier Marco Bertinetto concentrates on how Actionality and Aspect relate to each other, an issue on which a general consensus among the scholars is lacking. Actionality has to do with the nature of the event type referred to by the verbal predicate; an event can be: ±durative, ±homogeneous, ±dynamic. We therefore have four classes of verbs (according to Vendler's taxonomy; p. 178):

1. stat(iv)es (durative, non dynamic, homogeneous; for e.g., "to be good-natured")
2. activities (durative, dynamic, homogeneous; for e.g., "to walk")
3. achievements (non durative, dynamic, non homogeneous; for e.g., "to reach the top")
4. accomplishments (durative, dynamic, non homogeneous; for e.g., "to build a house")

Of course, "the assignment of a given predicate to an actional class is subject to at least two conditions. First, the predicate should be understood as an argumental frame, i.e. a predicate with its arguments […] *draw* is always an activity, *draw a circle* is an accomplishment." Second, we must look at the nature of the determiner phrase: while "draw a circle" or "draw three circles" are accomplishments, "draw circles" is again an activity. Aspect has to do with the perspective adopted in reporting the relevant event; perfective events correspond to closed intervals (in which the event is viewed in its entirety; "John wrote a letter"), while imperfective events correspond to open intervals

(their conclusion lies outside the horizon of the language user; "John was writing a letter"; p. 184). According to Bertinetto, Actionality and Aspect are to be considered two independent categories: "Note that Aspect is directly conveyed by the various tenses available within any given language. It is thus a completely independent category with respect to Actionality, considering that the latter is ultimately attached to the lexical meaning of the various predicates. In other words, while Aspect is vehicled by morphosyntactic devices, Actionality is a property of the lexicon" (p. 184). Bertinetto argues that the open / closed interval interpretation, induced by aspectual operators, is potentially available for every event type, against the widespread opinion that a verb in the perfective can only express telic eventualities and vice versa: "the categories of (im)perfectivity and (a)telicity do not co-vary" (p. 197). For example, if we consider the sentence "the book was on the table", we see that it may have two interpretations: (a) the book was on the table for a definite period of time; (b) at some specific reference time, the book was there for an indefinite period of time. In both cases the event is a state: though interpretation (a) is perfective, whilst interpretation (b) is imperfective, "no difference whatsoever is introduced in the stative nature of the event by the two readings" (p. 194). Bertinetto shows that the independency of these two categories, though particularly evident in languages with a rich morphology (where they often have different ways of manifesting themselves), can also be traced in languages with a poor morphology, giving evidence from the Slavonic and ancient Germanic.

Both linguists and philosophers of

language will find the papers contained in this book challenging and provocative. Putting forth some of the most debated issues in both fields they open the way to a very fruitful cooperation for which, no doubt, times are ripe.

Nicoletta Di Blas,
(diblas@mail2.elet.polimi.it)
Politecnico di Milano

Dieter Prokop. *Der Kampf um die Medien. Das Geschichtsbuch der neuen kritischen Medienforschung.* Hamburg: VSA-Verlag, 2001.

In der Medienwirkungsforschung gibt es einen allbekannten Alptraum, in dem die auf den Kommunikationsprozess immer zahlreicher werdenden Einflüsse zu einem absolut undurchschaubaren Interdependenzgeflecht ausarten. Nüchtern wird von der Komplexität des Forschungsgagenstandes gesprochen. Dieter Prokop umgeht diese Gefahr und lässt «die Mediengeschichte nicht in der Pedanterie von Ansätzen und Modellen enden» sondern beschreibt «Problemkonflikte, welche die Massen und das Massenbeliebte betreffen».

Was im Titel dieses soziologischen Medienforschungsbeitrages sofort auffällt, ist der streitlustige Grundton, der sich sozusagen zweidimensional wahrnehmen lässt: auf der inhaltlichen Ebene heißt es «Kampf um die Medien», zum Ausdruck kommt das Hauptmerkmal dieser Geschichtsschreibung und zwar die Darstellung der Interessenkonflikte *um* die Medien; auf der forschungskritischen Ebene wird der mutmaßlich *veralteten* kriti-

schen Medienforschung die «neue kritische Medienforschung» entgegengesetzt.

In der Einleitung bemüht sich der Autor, neben den üblichen Objekt- und Standortbestimmungen den Titel zu rechtfertigen und entwirft folgendes Programm: Massenmedien haben schon immer im Dienste der Interessen der Mächtigen gestanden, also ist es sinnvoll die «subtilen Mittel der Manipulation» in Bezug auf ihre Funktion von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart zu verfolgen, ohne aber, und hier setzt die *neue* kritische Medienforschung ein, auf die alten Beschwerden über «Standardisierung, Verflachung […] und über das unpolitische, ichschwache, […] dumme Publikum» zurückzugreifen; stattdessen untersucht Prokop «wo und wie sich in der Mediengeschichte identitäts-stärkende, solidarische, rational diskursive Kommunikations- und Entscheidungsformen entwickelten, durch welche Macht- und Wirtschaftsstrukturen und welche Theorien sie verhindert wurden und in welchen strukturellen Konstellationen sie sich trotz aller Macht- und Wirtschaftsinteressen durchsetzten». Demnach unterrichtet man in dieser 495-Seiten dicken Abhandlung nicht über Kommunikationsprozesse mit einseitiger Intention, Transmission und Rezeption, sondern über massenmedial vermittelte Kommunikationsvorgänge, welche dem Prinzip der impliziten Reziprozität folgen mit einem besonderen Augenmerk auf die Medien-Interessekämpfe und Medien-Problemkonflikte.

Hier setzt aber ein tiefgründiges Problem an: die irgendwann im Laufe der Geschichte niedergeschriebenen Informationen sind für den gegenwärti-