

REVIEWS

Definite descriptions. By PAUL ELBOURNE. (Oxford studies in semantics and pragmatics 1.) Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Pp. 251. ISBN 9780199660209. \$50.

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This book presents a development and refinement of the analysis of definite descriptions (and pronouns) that appears in Elbourne's (2005) book *Situations and individuals*. That analysis is Fregean, according to which definite descriptions are referential expressions that presuppose the existence and uniqueness of a referent. The main foci of the book are reviewing and adding arguments in favor of the analysis, and addressing problems that have been raised against it. The main competitor is, of course, the Russellian, quantificational analysis, and in addition to arguing for the Fregean approach, E presents problems for this competitor.

Ch. 1 ('Introduction', 1–16) briefly reviews not two but six analyses of definite descriptions: (i) Russell's (1905); (ii) Donnellan's (1966), according to which descriptions are ambiguous between a quantificational and a referential interpretation; (iii) Frege's (1892); (iv) Graff (Fara)'s (2001) predicate analysis; (v) Heim's (1982) familiarity view; and (vi) Szabó's (2000) existential theory. E notes three prominent problems for the Fregean view (true negative existence statements, presupposition failures that result in falsity rather than lack of a truth value, and true sentences about propositional attitudes toward nonexistent entities) that are addressed later in the book, and then briefly argues against analyses (iv)–(vi) above.

Ch. 2 ('Situation semantics', 17–41) gives a detailed formal presentation of the variety of situation semantics to be presupposed. This is important, because a crucial part of E's analysis is the inclusion of situation variables in definite descriptions. Situations, following Barwise & Perry 1983, are entities possessing properties at spatio-temporal locations. (One small issue crops up occasionally: whether including a location excludes abstract entities.) Sentence meanings are sets of situations, here called 'Kripkean propositions'. The actual utterance of a sentence on a particular occasion results in an Austinian proposition: '[t]he pair of a sentence meaning and the topic situation that it is meant to describe' (18). Interestingly, E notes that he does not actually believe in the existence of nonactual situations, holding instead that 'meanings are internal mental structures' (19).

Ch. 3 ('The definite article', 42–51) gives an analysis that, as E notes, is based on one given by Heim and Kratzer (1998). E's version is below (47).

$$(1) \llbracket \text{the} \rrbracket = \lambda f_{\langle e, \text{st} \rangle} . \lambda s : s \in D_s \ \& \ \exists ! x f(x)(s) = 1. \ \iota x f(x)(s) = 1$$

This makes the definite article a function from properties (expressed by the NP with which *the* combines) to functions from situations to entities—those that uniquely possess the property in the situation in question. Definite descriptions have the structure shown in 2.

$$(2) \llbracket [\text{the NP}] s \rrbracket$$

Crucially, though, any particular definite description has the possibility of receiving two analyses, depending on whether the situation variable in 2 (which E refers to as a 'situation pronoun') is bound.

Ch. 4 ('Presupposition', 52–103) is an extended discussion of how the presuppositions associated with definite descriptions appear or fail to appear in the contexts associated with modals, conditionals, disjunctions (assumed here to be equivalent to conditionals), negation, and sometimes just ordinary sentences. In the case of modals, the requirement of a unique referent for a definite description must be satisfied relative to the situation from which the alternative possible worlds are accessible. Similarly for conditionals, except those whose antecedents actually assert the existence and uniqueness of a referent for a definite description occurring in the consequent. In that case, the presupposition does not project. When we come to negation, presuppositions generally project, with the exception of true negative existentials. In this case E proposes implicit

modalization, so that the existence and uniqueness of the entity in question is satisfied relative to imaginary situations, and such an entity is asserted not to exist in the Austinian topic situation (typically one in the actual world). The longest discussion is devoted to ‘presupposition obviation’—cases like Strawson’s (1954:226) example of someone declaring that they had had lunch with the King of France, which we would judge to be false, rather than truth-valueless.

Ch. 5 (‘Referential and attributive’, 104–19) shows how E’s analysis can provide suitable propositions for both referential and attributive uses of definite descriptions. Recall that the analysis provides two possibilities for the situation pronoun occurring with a definite description. When the pronoun is taken to refer to a particular situation, the referential interpretation results, but when the pronoun is bound the result is that the presupposition of the existence and uniqueness of a referent, rather than simply the referent itself, is included within the proposition expressed. Predicative uses are then analyzed as attributive uses. (In this respect E’s analysis seems more similar to Donnellan’s than Frege’s.)

Ch. 6 (‘Anaphora’, 120–32) discusses cases in which definite descriptions occur bound. One variety is donkey sentences, where the binder of the description does not c-command it, as in 3a below, and the others are cases of c-command binding, as in 3b (from Wilson 1984:23).

- (3) a. Every man who owns a donkey beats the donkey.
 b. Every Bulgarian scientist who was fired from the observatory was consoled by someone who had known the Bulgarian scientist as a youth.

As E notes, the analysis here is very similar to the one in his 2005 book.

Ch. 7 (‘Modality’, 133–49) investigates several related phenomena. One is the handling of the *de dicto/de re* ambiguity. Russell, of course, treated it as a matter of scope, but as Bäuerle’s (1983) classic example shows, that cannot be correct, or at least cannot be sufficient (141). Consider 4, under the assumption that George has formed a belief about a busload of men.

- (4) George believes that a Mancunian woman loves all the Manchester United players.

Example 4 should be understood on the reading where George does not know that the bus contains all of the Manchester United players, but just believes that some Mancunian woman or other loves all of them. Here again, situation variables come to the rescue. The main focus of the chapter is on some interesting examples given by Cresswell (1990) and Kratzer (2014), showing, as Kratzer put it, ‘that natural languages have the full expressive power of object language quantification over worlds and times’ (2014:§5). Cresswell’s (1990:40) example is given in 5.

- (5) If the economic climate had been favourable, it would have been desirable that some who are not actually rich but would then have been rich be poor.

Loosely speaking, sentences like this involve considering alternatives to alternatives.

Ch. 8 (‘Existence entailments’, 150–71) discusses arguments in favor of a Fregean approach to definite descriptions based on the behavior of their existence entailments in the contexts created by propositional attitudes, conditionals, and modals. Consider 6a,b, for example (151).

- (6) a. Hans wants the ghost in his attic to be quiet tonight.
 b. Hans wants there to be exactly one ghost in his attic and for it to be quiet tonight.

These are clearly not equivalent, something that apparently presents a problem for the Russellian who would claim that the complement clauses are equivalent. E also points out that indefinite descriptions, for which a Russellian quantificational analysis is more appealing, differ from definites in that the existence assertion can be conditionally preserved in such contexts. The appendix to this chapter shows how the formal analysis can be extended so as to account for the fact that in propositional attitude contexts, the Fregean presupposition of existence (and uniqueness) is shifted from the speaker to the subject of the propositional attitude verb.

Ch. 9 (‘Incompleteness’, 172–90) deals with incomplete definite descriptions—those whose surface content does not, by itself, determine a unique referent. There are a number of theories in existence about how a unique referent is determined for such cases. E reviews five of them, four of which variably supply content either (covertly) syntactically, pragmatically, or in the language

of thought. E's approach, following, for example, Recanati 1996, 2004, associates predicates with situation variables. Crucial data concerning missing sloppy identity readings (similar to some discussed in Elbourne 2005) appears to argue for the correctness of this approach.

Ch. 10 ('Pronouns', 191–230) continues to develop E's theory (originally put forward by Postal (1966), and laid out in detail in E's 2005 book) that 'pronouns quite generally have the semantics of definite articles' (191). Consider the parallel structures in 7 (193).

- (7) a. [[the NP] s_i]
 b. [[it NP] s_i]

E argues that this analysis allows for uses of pronouns—anaphoric, referential, bound, descriptive (e.g. Nunberg 1993), and 'Voldemort', as in 8.

- (8) He Who Must Not Be Named is named 'Voldemort'.

Much of the chapter is concerned with some complexities of the NP deletion process for pronouns, or whatever it is that explains why the NPs in expressions of the form of 7b do not occur overtly.

Ch. 11 ('Conclusion', 231) is a brief summary of the contents of the book, listing some of its many accomplishments.

This book is an impressive one, and a must-read for scholars in the areas it covers. The references are extensive and the presentation is generally clear, but the analyses are formal and require concentration. Fortunately, the presentation is leavened occasionally by the wry wit of the author, as hopefully the passage below concerning 10 (where italics indicate downstressing) illustrates.

- (10) If a farmer owns a donkey he always beats the donkey and the priest *beats the donkey* too.

Concerning this example, E says (183):

Applying our semantics, we obtain the truth-conditions in (25):

- (25) λs . For every minimal situation s' such that $s' \leq s$ and
 there is an individual x and a situation s'' such that s'' is a minimal situation such that $s'' \leq s^*$ and $s'' \leq s'$ and x is a farmer in s'' , such that there is a situation s''' such that s''' is a minimal situation such that $s''' \leq s''$ and $s''' \leq s'$ and there is an individual y and a situation s'''' such that s'''' is a minimal situation such that $s'''' \leq s^*$ and $s'''' \leq s''$ and y is a donkey in s'''' , such that there is a situation s''''' such that s''''' is a minimal situation such that $s''''' \leq s''''$ and $s''''' \leq s''$ and x owns y in s''''' ,
 there is a situation s'' such that s'' is a minimal situation such that $s' \leq s''$ and $s'' \leq s$ and τz is a farmer in s' beats in s'' τz is a donkey in s' and τz is a priest in s^* beats in s'' τz is a donkey in s' .

These truth conditions are intuitively accurate.

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English rhythms in Russian verse: On the experiment of Joseph Brodsky. By NILA FRIEDBERG. (Trends in linguistics, studies and monographs 232.) Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2011. Pp. xii, 209. ISBN 9783110238082. \$140 (Hb).

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Nila Friedberg's *English rhythms in Russian verse: On the experiment of Joseph Brodsky* emerges from the synthesis of two research methods with long histories. The first is QUANTITATIVE POETICS OR QUANTITATIVE VERSIFICATION, which seeks to explore poetic trends and individual practice through formal description (as employed by the Russian Symbolist poet Andrej Belyj at the beginning of the twentieth century) and through chronologically organized, corpus-level descriptive statistics (as in the work of Kiril Taranovski, beginning in the 1950s). In this respect, quantitative poetics as a research method precedes by almost a century the DISTANT READING that emerged from the Literature Lab established by Franco Moretti and Matthew Jockers at Stanford University in the twenty-first century. The second methodological anchor for F's book is GENERATIVE METRICS, a rule-based and constraint-based approach to the analysis of poetic practice in the context of generative phonology, popularized in the second half of the twentieth century by such scholars as Morris Halle and Samuel J. Keyser, Paul Kiparsky, and Bruce Hayes, with F following the versions of the latter two scholars.

F's study can be understood as having two principal research questions. The first, which informs the title of the volume, is: When Brodsky writes innovative Russian verse, can the deviations be understood as being associated specifically with the English verse tradition? The second, which intersects in some ways with the first, is: Should Brodsky's innovative rhythms be regarded as RULE-MAKING OR RULE-BREAKING? F's answers to these questions are formal and statistical claims (or they at least can properly and profitably be understood as such), and for that reason they are amenable to exploration and testing specifically through formal mechanisms of the sort employed in generative poetics and the statistical corpus-based modeling pioneered in the Russian quantitative tradition.

F identifies regularities in the rhythm of English and Russian verse, with the goal of determining whether Brodsky's deviations from the rules and conventions of Russian meter and rhythm are specifically 'English'. The canonical metrical systems of Russian and English are fundamentally the same: both are (or, at least, are often) syllabotonic in orientation, with a preference for binary and ternary meters, so that it is meaningful in both traditions to speak of, for example, iambic tetrameter. Using the term STRESSED to refer to a linguistically stressed syllable and STRONG to a syllable where stress is anticipated according to the ambient meter of the poem, either long words or sequences of stressed monosyllables can produce discrepancies between the meter of a poem and the distribution of actual stresses in a specific line. This situation is exacerbated in Russian because Russian has more long words than English and, except in the case of compound words, does not permit secondary stress.