

A Referential Theory of Truth and Falsity. By  
ILHAN INAN. (New York and London:  
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It would be fair to say that sentential reference has been a peripheral issue in the philosophy of language. A majority of theorists accept without much discussion the Fregean view that true sentences refer to the true and the false sentences refer to the false. However, one could feel uncomfortable with this view for at least two reasons. First, the true and the false are objects in Frege's view, but it is not at all clear what kind of objects they are. Even if one takes the true as the collection of all facts, the problem with the false remains. Second, it does not sound plausible to say that all true sentences refer to the same thing. After all there are variety of referents for other referring expressions like names and definite descriptions; why sentences should be different?

Inan, in his book, discusses these problems (and many others) with Frege's theory of sentential reference and suggests an alternative. The book puts forward the following five core theses:

*Thesis of Sentential Reference:* A declarative sentence occurrence (that is a sentence type that occurs in a certain context) is a singular referring expression.

*Referential Theory of Truth:* Truth is a form of reference, i.e. a sentence occurrence is true just in case it uniquely refers.

*Referential Theory of Falsity:* Falsity is a form of failure of reference, i.e. a sentence occurrence is false just in case it fails to refer.

*Coreferentiality Thesis for Sentences:* A sentence occurrence is coreferential with its nominalization.

*State Theory of Sentential Reference:* The referent of a true sentence occurrence is the unique state that is specified by the content of that sentence. (p. 12)

Note that no definition or semantic analysis of truth and falsity is presented here; they are treated as primitive concepts. Truth is just explicated as a subspecies of reference. However, according to Inan, there is still something philosophically significant in these theses. The theory forms a bridge between the literatures of truth and reference, and the problems of truth and falsity become problems of reference.

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In 4 parts and 18 chapters Inan defends these theses and discusses their implications. Part I consists of the main discussion. Chapter 1 introduces the theory, and chapter 2 compares it with Frege's. Chapter 3 develops an imaginary English-like language called Whenglish, which does not contain sentences but still has the same expressive power as English. What sentences do in English, is done by their Whenglish counterparts called *whentences*, which are nothing more than the nominalisations of corresponding sentences. For instance, a Whenglish speaker utters the whentence "the Earth's being round" to refer to the same state an English speaker refers to by uttering the sentence "The Earth is round". The idea is to show that sentences in English are referring expressions as their Whenglish counterparts whentences clearly are. Chapter 4 concerns a set of arguments called "slingshot arguments" that are designed to show that sentences can refer to nothing but truth values. Some prominent theorists such as Church, Gödel, Davidson, and Kripke have developed their own slingshot arguments, but Inan argues that they all share a flawed assumption that logically equivalent sentences are coreferential.

Part II compares the referential theory with four rival theories of truth: correspondence theories, identity theory, truthmaker theories, and deflationism (chapters 5–8). The referential theory is similar to the correspondence theories in terms of considering truth as "a bridge between our thoughts and reality" (p. 286) and assuming that a true sentence matches with a unique part of reality. They are, however, different in two important respects. First, the referential theory does not need an extra correspondence relation just to account for truth and falsity; the ordinary reference relation is sufficient. Second, it does not commit to the existence of facts; states are posited as compatible with various ontological positions.

Part III concerns logical operations and it is clearly the most controversial part of the book. Inan argues that negative, disjunctive, conditional, existential, and general statements refer to conceptual states not world states (chapters 9–11). That is, logical expressions in these types of statements are reference shifting operators. Due to space limitations, I will only briefly address disjunction. Consider the following sentence:

- (1) The boy likes football or he likes basketball.

In this account, (1) refers to the state that at least one of the propositions *the boy likes football* and *the boy likes basketball* refer. Thus, disjunction generates a reference shifting context because the disjuncts refer to propositions; they do not refer to their ordinary referents, which are world states. When a reference shifting occurs, we would normally expect the substitution of the coreferential terms to cause a change in the reference of the sentence. In (1), however, one can substitute for instance "my office mate's son" with "the boy" and refer to the same state. Being aware of this problem, Inan suggests that failure of substitution might be a sufficient but not a necessary condition for reference shifting. Instead, he argues for a broader condition:

*Pragmatic Condition for Reference-shifting:* If a speaker utters a complex sentence which contains another embedded sentence in it and uses the whole sentence literally to make an assertion with the intention of referring to its semantic referent but does not thereby assert the embedded sentence within it, then the speaker intends to

refer, not to the customary referent of the embedded sentence (if it has one), but to its content. (p. 137)

It is clear that a speaker might assert a complex sentence without asserting an embedded clause within it, but from that can we conclude that she intends to refer the proposition the embedded clause expresses? Can we not conclude that she does not intend to refer to anything specific with the embedded clause? What leads Inan to this account seems mainly related to how he considers the principle of compositionality for reference. He takes the principle as implying that for a structured expression to refer all its parts must refer. That might hold for definite descriptions and simple sentences, but does it also hold for logically complex sentences? The principle of compositionality can be formulated in another way: For every complex expression  $e$  in  $L$ , the reference of  $e$  in  $L$  is determined by the structure of  $e$  in  $L$  and the references of the constituents of  $e$  in  $L$  (Szabó, Zoltán Gendler, "Compositionality", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2022 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2022/entries/compositionality/>). This conception of compositionality, as I take it, allows for a logically complex sentence to refer even if one of its constituent sentences does not refer. For instance (1) can refer only to the state that the boy likes basketball. Then there would be no need for assuming a reference shifting. Inan would complain about this solution since it allows a disjunctive sentence and one of the disjuncts to refer to the same state, which violates the uniqueness condition for sentential reference posited in the fifth core thesis above. I cannot see why the referential theory needs such a condition. Inan states that he takes over it from the correspondence theories, but he does not give an argument for it.

The final part of the book discusses various implications of the referential theory. This part is especially important in terms of showing how various issues and distinctions concerning truth and reference can be handled together when sentences are taken as referring to states. Chapter 12 concludes that liar paradox could be seen as a more general paradox of reference, and it offers a contextual solution to a version of the paradox. Chapters 13, 15 and 16 apply the distinctions speaker's/semantic reference, rigid/accidental designator and necessity/contingency to sentences, and arrive at some very interesting conclusions such as there are sentences (e.g., "Sue is happy") which refer to the same contingent state in every possible world where that state exists; that is, these sentences are rigid but at the same time contingent in the sense of expressing a contingent truth. Chapters 14 and 17 revisit some topics covered in Inan's previous book *The Philosophy of Curiosity*, where Inan points out a distinction between knowing that a term refers and knowing what it refers to. If one does not have the objectual type of knowledge of the referent, the term would be *inostensible* for that person. Beginning to know the referent would make the term gradually *ostensible*. This ostensible/inostensible reference distinction naturally applies to sentences in the referential theory. One might know that a sentence is true, which means it refers to a state, but still, she might not know much about what state it refers to. Being aware of this lack of knowledge could make that person curious about that state. For instance, a high school student could know that "Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo" refers to a historical state without knowing who Napoleon is or where Water-

loo is, and this could make her curious about the state. The final chapter of the book speculates on the evolution of language, in particular how concepts, including the concepts of truth and falsity, might have arisen.

Let me say a few words about the style of the book. Although the language and discussion are very lucid, I found that the long paragraphs reduced readability. Dividing chapters into sections would also have been helpful for the readers to track the progress of the discussion. An interesting point about the book is the sparse use of footnotes, which I think proves that a scholarly book can be authoritative without bombarding the reader with small details.

To conclude I should express the feeling that reading Inan's book was an intellectual pleasure for me. Considering its originality, scope, and strength in argumentation, I expect this book to breathe new life into the age-old debate about truth.