

## A Diachronic Semantics for Inexact Reference

LA VERNE SHELTON\*

We have evidence, in the form of paradoxes like Eubulides' paradox of the heap, that the semantical relations between ordinary languages and the world are inexact. This lack of fit has seemed to be unproblematic, and perhaps even appropriate, given our physical limitations and the methods we use for getting information. We can correctly apply our concepts even though we measure inaccurately. Until we assume that small changes in the world cause no differences in the applicability of the concepts, and reiterate applications, we encounter no problem. But Eubulides and many others since his time have claimed that this sort of reiteration yields contradictory assertions.

Although inexact reference is ubiquitous and exact reference is rare, only for the latter do we have fully satisfactory semantical theories. I wish to suggest a framework for a semantical theory for inexact reference which departs in several important respects from the usual ones. My central pre-supposition, that reference is a diachronic phenomenon,<sup>1</sup> can take two forms. The weaker is that the reference of a token of a singular term (for example, 'Fred') is not determined merely by facts about the time and situation in which it is actually used, but also depends, in an essential manner, on other, usually earlier, uses of 'Fred' by speakers appropriately connected to the speaker at the given time. At least this much has been supposed in the historical pictures of reference which have been in development since the early papers of Kripke, Kaplan, Putnam, and others. But a supporter of this form of diachronic semantics might say further that at time *t* the reference of 'Fred' is *already determined* and, moreover, that one might be in a position, given all the

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