Non-straightforward communication[1]

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Abstract

This paper studies linguistic expressions of non-straightforwardness, such as *sort of* and *whatshisname* and proposes an analysis within the framework of Functional Discourse Grammar. It is shown that the presence of an Interpersonal Level within this model as well as the various layers that make up this level provide the means to give a systematic account of the distribution and behaviour of these elements in a wide variety of languages.

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1 Introduction

In this paper we study the grammatical and lexical strategies that speakers use to convey that the message they intend to communicate is not straightforwardly covered by the basic elements contained in their utterance. Some initial examples of this phenomenon are given in (1)-(3)[2]:

(1)   She reminded him of *whatshisname*, the Italian portrait painter. (COCA)

(2)   But, yeah a bit much uh I was quite I was quite kind of *like theoretical* about it
        <ICE-GB:S1A-034 #102:1:B>

(3)   A *true Hindu*, according to Gandhi, is one "who believes in God, immortality of
        the soul, transmigration, the law of Karma and Moksha, and who tries to practise
        Truth and Ahimsa in daily life …" (BNC)

In (1) the speaker cannot find the right expression for the name of the Italian artist he wants to refer to and uses a dummy expression; in (2) the speaker is not entirely satisfied with the expression *theoretical* and indicates this by means of the word *like*; in (3), on the other hand, the speaker is particularly satisfied with the expression chosen, and indicates this by means of the word *true*. In all these cases (part of) the message is presented as non-straightforward.

In order to find some method in this at first sight rather mixed bag of communicative strategies, we will use the framework of Functional Discourse Grammar, and more specifically the Interpersonal Level of analysis within this model. We will begin by presenting the relevant features of this level (Section 2). Next, in Section 3 we will show how the expression of non-straightforwardness applies at a number of layers relevant at the Interpersonal Level: the Ascriptive Subact, the Referential Subact, and the Communicated Content. The various types of non-straightforwardness for each of these layers are subsequently discussed in Sections 4-6, first in general, and then in more detail for English. Finally, Section 7 summarizes our findings.

Note that we concentrate on the linguistic encoding of non-straightforwardness in this paper. There are of course many other ways in which speakers can be less than straightforward: by using obscure expressions, evasive language, contradictions, etc. These strategies are related to discourse organization or may depend on implicatures, but are not necessarily reflected in grammatical structure.

2 The Interpersonal Level in Functional Discourse Grammar

One of the distinctive features of FDG, as compared to FG as well as to other grammar models, is that it has a top-down organization, starting with the encoding of the

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[2] The English examples in this paper were taken from a variety of sources: The International Corpus of English, Great Britain (ICE-GB), The British National Corpus (BYU-BNC), The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and the Internet (Google search).

Speaker's intention and then working its way down to articulation. By organizing the grammar in this way, FDG takes the functional approach to language to its logical extreme: within the top-down organization, pragmatics governs semantics, pragmatics and semantics govern morphosyntax, and pragmatics, semantics and morphosyntax govern phonology. In this paper, it will be argued that the expression of straightforwardness belongs to the realm of pragmatics: it serves to express the attitude of the speaker towards the information s/he is transmitting rather than to contribute to the semantic content of the expression in which it occurs. We will, therefore, start our discussion by giving a brief description of the Interpersonal Level and an indication of the place that straightforwardness may take at this level.

The Interpersonal Level (IL) deals with all the formal aspects of a linguistic unit that reflect its role in the interaction between Speaker and Addressee (Hengeveld & Mackenzie 2008: 46). In keeping with the overall architecture of FDG, the layers making up IL are organized hierarchically; they can be represented as follows (Hengeveld & Mackenzie 2008: 49):

(4) $(\Pi\ M_1:[$ Move

          $(\Pi\ A_1:\ [$ Act

                   $(\Pi\ F_1:\ \text{ILL}\ (F_1):\ \Sigma\ (F_1))_\Phi$ Illocution

                   $(\Pi\ P_1:\ ....\ (P_1):\ \Sigma\ (P_1))_\Phi$ Speaker

                   $(\Pi\ P_2:\ ....\ (P_2):\ \Sigma\ (P_2))_\Phi$ Addressee

                   $(\Pi\ C_1:\ \ [$ Communicated Content

                           $(\Pi\ T_1\ [...]\ (T_1):\ \Sigma\ (T_1))_\Phi$ Subact of Ascription

                           $(\Pi\ R_1\ [...]\ (R_1):\ \Sigma\ (R_1))_\Phi$ Subact of Reference

                $]\ (C_1):\ \Sigma\ (C_1))_\Phi$ Communicated Content

        $]\ (A_1):\ \Sigma\ (A_1))_\Phi$ Act

     $]\ (M_1):\ \Sigma\ (M_1))_\Phi$ Move

At the highest level in this hierarchy we find the Move (M_1), which describes the entire segment of discourse relevant at this level. The Move consists of one or more (temporally ordered) Discourse Acts (A_1, A_2), which together form its (complex) Head. Each Act in turn consists of an Illocution (F_1), the Speech Participants (P_1 and P_2) and a Communicated Content (C_1). Finally, within the Communicated Content, one or more Subacts of Reference (R_1) and Ascription (T_1) are executed by the Speaker, by means of which he refers to entities and ascribes properties to these entities.

The production of a linguistic utterance requires, first of all, the selection of the appropriate frame(s), defining the possible combinations of elements at each layer. Next the various slots of the selected frame are gradually filled in, starting with the head. In most cases, the head of a unit at IL is configurational (i.e. consisting of the next layer in the hierarchy) or empty (typically in the case of Ascriptive Subacts). Occasionally,

some of the units at this level can have a lexical head (e.g. proper names or interjections).

The next step consists in selecting the modifiers (lexical elements; Σ) and operators (grammatical elements; Π) needed to further specify the message. These, too, can be found at each of the layers. At the layer of the Move, for instance, modifiers may take the form of discourse-structuring devices, such as *in sum*, *however*, etc.; at the layer of the Discourse Act, modifiers may express rhetorical properties of the Act (e.g. *finally*); at the level of the Illocution modifiers may function to modify the illocutionary manner (e.g. *honestly*, *frankly*), etc. Similarly, grammatically expressed information can be specified at each of the layers. Honorifics, for instance, may be represented by operators specifying the Speech Participants, while operators applying to Subacts of Reference are primarily concerned with the identifiability of the referent.

The degree of straightforwardness of a linguistic expression reflects the extent to which speakers are able or willing to provide the exact amount of information needed for successful or felicitous communication. Although in many cases there is an undeniable link between the linguistic coding of straightforwardness and such representational matters as predication and denotation, straightforwardness will first and foremost be seen as pertaining to the Interpersonal Level, i.e. as modifying or specifying the actions performed by the speaker in his/her interaction with an Addressee (Hengeveld & Mackenzie 2008: 46). This means that the most likely positions in the model for representing this kind of information are the head, operator, and modifier slots at IL. Our next step will be to identify at which layer, or layers, straightforwardness is to be represented.

3 Non-straightforwardness in Functional Discourse Grammar

Expressions of non-straightforwardness are expressions that pertain to the Interpersonal Level: unlike units at the Representational Level they have no designating force. Instead, they modify all or part of the information the speaker wants to bring across, which, as shown in Section 2, is captured by the Communicated Content. Non-straightforwardness, as defined in Sections 1 and 2, can apply to each of the units involved at this layer: the two types of Subact, Ascriptive and Referential, or the Communicated Content as a whole. For a first impression of how each of these units may be affected, consider the following examples:

(5)   I keep *sort of* thinking about that and coming back to it. (Google)

(6)   I think I can more or less understand in general terms what happens up until *sort of* the impressionist time, maybe just post-impressionist. (BNC)

(7)   McCain backtracks on gay adoption, *sort of*. (Google)

In (5) *sort of* modifies the verb *think_about*, which is the linguistic manifestation of an Ascriptive Subact; in (6) it modifies the noun phrase *the impressionist time*, the linguistic manifestation of a Referential Subact; and in (7) it modifies the entire preceding utterance, which constitutes the Communicated Content transmitted by the Speaker.

In terms of the linguistic strategies used, three elements in the construction of these layers may express non-straightforwardness: the head, an operator, or a modifier. Schematically, we thus have the options in (8)-(10):

(8) $(\Pi\ T_1:\ head\ (T_1):\ \Sigma\ (T_1))$ Ascriptive Subact

(9) $(\Pi\ R_1:\ head\ (R_1):\ \Sigma\ (R_1))$ Referential Subact

(10) $(\Pi\ C_1:\ head\ (C_1):\ \Sigma\ (C_1))$ Communicated Content

where in each case the italicised positions (Π, head and Σ) can be used for the expression of non-straightforwardness.

By way of example, consider the ways in which an Ascriptive Subact may be qualified as non-straightforward:

(11) $(\Pi\ T_1:\ whatchamacallit\ (T_1):\ \Sigma\ (T_1))$
        'She used the *whatchamacallit* color.' (Google)

(12) $(Approx\ T_1:\ H\ (T_1):\ \Sigma\ (T_1))$
        'The color of my eye is yellow-*ish.*' (Google)

(13) $(\Pi\ T_1:\ H\ (T_1):\ more\ or\ less\ (T_1))$
        'light hair is to be regarded as a "subdued orange," which is *more or less* yellow, red, or brown' (Google)

In (11) *watchamacallit* is used as a dummy that holds the position of an Ascriptive Subact that is not realized by the appropriate lexical means. It is therefore represented as occupying the head position of that Subact. In (12) the Speaker does make a lexical choice, but then modifies the lexeme grammatically by means of the approximative suffix *–ish*. Modification expressed by grammatical means is represented by means of operators in FDG, hence the presence of the operator 'Approx' in the formula in (12). In (13) the same effect is brought about by a lexical modifier, which is represented as a restrictor in FDG.

Apart from three different Layers and three different linguistic strategies, a further distinction has to be made between different degrees of non-straightforwardness. We will here distinguish three values: un(der)specified, approximate, and exact, which are the three types of non-straightforwardness illustrated by our initial examples (1)-(3), respectively. In all, this gives us logically 27 combinations of Interpersonal Layers, degrees of non-straightforwardness, and linguistic strategies. By their very nature, some of these combinations are excluded, which leaves us with the following possibilities:

Layer	Degree	Strategy
Ascriptive Subact	Un(der)specified	Head
	Approximate	Operator, Modifier
	Exact	Operator, Modifier
Referential Subact	Un(der)specified	Head
	Approximate	Operator, Modifier
	Exact	Operator, Modifier
Communicated Content	Un(der)specified	Head
	Approximate	Operator, Modifier
	Exact	Operator, Modifier

Table 1. Interpersonal Layers, degrees of non-straightforwardness, and linguistic strategies

Note that Hengeveld & Mackenzie (2008) limit their discussion of non-straightforwardness to Ascriptive Subacts. We intend to show in this paper that it applies equally well to Referential Subacts and Communicated Contents.

4 Non-straightforward Ascriptive Subacts

4.1 Introduction

Ascription and reference are actional categories. It is the speaker that ascribes and refers through the selection of the appropriate linguistic material and strategies. In the case of ascription the Subact concerns the selection of the appropriate predicative linguistic means. It is important to note in this respect that the same semantic unit can be used now ascriptively, now referentially, as in the following examples:

(14)   I met **a German expat**.

(15)   He is **a German expat**.

In (14) the noun phrase *a German expat* is used referentially, in (15) it is used ascriptively.

Ascriptive Subacts are relevant at the clause level but also at the level of the phrase. Example (14), for instance, would be analyzed as in (16):

(16)
$(C_I: [\quad (T_I) \quad\quad (R_I) (R_J: [(T_J) \quad\quad\quad (T_K) \quad\quad](R_I))] \quad\quad (C_I))$
$(e_i: [(f_i: [(f_j: meet (f_j)) (x_i) (x_j: [(f_j: expat (f_k)) (x_j)_U]: [(f_l: German (f_l)) (x_j)_U])] (f_i)) (e_i))_U])$

The Communicated Content contains an Ascriptive Subact (T$_I$) and two Referential Subacts (R$_I$) and (R$_J$). The Referential Subact (R$_J$) itself contains two Ascriptive Subacts (T$_J$) and (T$_K$), which gradually build up the picture of the intended referent through the successive predication of properties. All Ascriptive Subacts, whether at the clause level or phrase level, whether verbal, nominal, adjectival, adverbial or adpositional, may be non-straightforward. We turn to such non-straightforward Ascriptive Subacts now, organizing our discussion in terms of the various degrees of non-straightforwardness identified in Section 3.

4.2 Un(der)specified Ascriptive Subacts

Languages often have special strategies to indicate that the Speaker cannot remember a particular word, when the speaker is confronted with a lexical gap or, occasionally, when a speaker wishes to avoid use of the appropriate lexical item. These strategies allow the Speaker to continue communicating, while inviting the Addressee to reconstruct the intended meaning from the context. An example from Turkish is given in (17):

Turkish (Barış Kabak, pers. comm.)
(17)   Tamam, o   zaman   on-lar-ı   bırak-ın   burda,
        Okay   DEM   time   DEM-PL-ACC   leave-IMP.PL   here
            diploma-nız-ı=da   Pazartesi
            diploma-2.PL.POSS-ACC=TOP   Monday
            şey   et-tir-ip   öyle   getir-in.
            thingummy   do-CAUS-NARR   like.that   bring-IMP.PL
        'OK, then leave the others here, and have your diploma thingummied (certified)
        on Monday and bring it like that.'

The element *şey* 'thingummy' takes the place of a main predicate. Examples (18) from Dutch and (19) from Hup show unspecified Ascriptive Subacts within Referential Acts:

Dutch
(18)   Een   *dinges*   filter doet wonderen! (Google)
        A   thingummy   filter does miracles
        'A thingummy filter does miracles.'

Hup (Epps 2008: 715)
(19)   N'ikán=mah   yúp   *hɑ̃̌y*   mɔy ...
        over.there=REPORT   DEM   thingummy house ...
        'Over there were the watchamacallit burrows ...'

In both (18) and (19) the dummy takes the place of a modifier within a noun phrase.
        The examples given so far concern dummies that do not provide descriptive or identifying information at all. In other cases dummies distinguish between high-level semantic subclasses such as human versus non-human, or male versus female. The following examples from Brazilian Portuguese illustrate these semantic oppositions:

Brazilian Portuguese

(20) Dois fulan-o-s   lá   do
      two   thingummy-M-PL   there   from.the
          bairro   andam à   tua   procura.
          neighbourhood   walk   at   your   search
      'Two thingummies from the neighbourhood are looking for you.'

(21) Se   discute qual   das   duas   fulan-a-s
      REFL   discuss which   of.the   two   thingummy-F-PL
          matou   alguém.
          killed   someone
      'They're discussing which of the two thingummies killed someone.'

The lexemes fulano/fulana can only be used for human beings; the masculine form in (20) can thus only refer to males, the feminine form in (21) only to females.

When we turn to English, we find a large variety of dummy expressions. A simple search in an arbitrary thesaurus provides the following (non-exhaustive) list of dummy expressions:

(22) doodad [N. Amer], doohickey [N. Amer], dojigger [N. Amer], gimmick, gizmo, gismo, gubbins [Brit], thingamabob, thingumabob, thingmabob, thingamajig, thingumajig, thingummy, thingmajig, whatchamacallit, whatchamacallum, whatsis, widget, doodah [Brit], doobry [Brit], doobrie [Brit], thingy, dingus [N. Amer], doofer [Brit], thingo [Austral], doover [Austral], whatsit (World Web Online, Dictionary and Thesaurus, http://www.wordwebonline.com/en)

Crystal (1995a) refers to these expressions as 'nonsense words, used in order to signal a breakdown in the speaker's ongoing mental processing --; when a word has become completely unretrievable'. He distinguishes the following groups:

- a *thing* group: thingamabob, thingamabobbit, thingamajig, thingummy, thingummybob, thingy, thingybob
- a *wh* group: whatchacallit, whatchacallem, whatchamacallit, whatever, whatsisname, whatsit, whatsits, what not, whosis, whosit, whosits
- a *d* group: deeleebob, deeleebobber, diddleebob, diddleydo, diddleything, diddlethingy, dingus, dingdong, dingy, dooda, doodad, doohickey
- a *g* group: gadget, geega, gewgaw, gimmick, gizmo, goodie
- a small miscellaneous group: hootenanny (US only), lookit, widget, and oojamaflop (Crystal 1995a; see also 1995b: 132)

A number of these items are unspecified: they can be used to refer to any type of entity. In particular, members of the *thing*-group seem to lend themselves for this use. Thus, although expressions like *thingummy* and *thingamajig*, as well as *dingus*, are typically used to refer to inanimate objects, they can also be used to describe animals and persons. The same is true for the rather ubiquitous expression *so-and-so*. Some examples are given in (23):

(23) a   But he's a forgotten *thingummy* and all that, I had to be reminded to
           recognize who the hell he was. (Google)
      b   But what is sad and pathetic is that you are calling the arrest of your two hit
           men another LTTE/Raneel conspiracy. My dear old soul. Isn't that rather
           like flogging a dead *thingummy* if not actually whats-itting a thingamabob?
           (Google)
      c   Instead of gallantly giving a present to the *dingus* who ruined what was left
           of the United States, ... (Google)
      d   He discovers another lonely *thingamajig* who has been rejected for her
           different features. (Google)
      e   "What kind of a *thingamajig* am I again?" he would ask the man. "You are
           Donkey!" the man would answer. (Google)
      f   Couldn't believe it! Honestly! Miserable *so and so*! Isn't she? (BNC)
      g   and have you tried the new *so and so*, buy it now or phone so and so, all
           credit cards accepted. (BNC)

Other dummy expressions, however, are more restricted in their use (compare examples
(20) and (21)). Thus there are some that can be used only to refer to things (e.g.
thingybob, *whatchacallit*, *whatchamacallit*, *whatever*), whereas others can only be used
when referring to persons. The latter group can be further subdivided into expressions
that are unspecified for gender (e.g. *whosis*, *whosit*, example (24a)), and those that can
be used to refer to male or female referents only (*whats(h)isname*/*whats(h)isface*;
whats(h)ername; example (24b)):

(24) a   What a lucky *whosit* I am to have received all of this kind assistance!
           (Google)
      b   She reminded him of *whatshisname*, the Italian portrait painter. (COCA)

Although typically used as substitutes for nominal lexemes, some English dummy
expressions can also be used as verbs; this seems to be restricted to expressions that can
also be used to refer to things:

(25) a   You've got *to thingybob* all through everything. (BNC)
      b   ... and am now at home reading the forum whilst marinating pork and frying
           tofu, to be *thingummied* with tomatoes and spring onions.
      c   Isn't that rather like flogging a dead thingummy if not actually *whats-itting* a
           thingamabob?
      d   Reagan *so and soed*, and then launched an attack. (Google)

4.3 Approximate Ascriptive Subacts

The approximation strategy consists in the qualification of a selected lexeme. Unlike in
the former strategies, a lexeme is selected to describe the entity referred to; at the same
time, however, the speaker makes it clear that the entity in question is not a prototypical
member of the class denoted by the lexeme in question. Dutch has morphological means
to express approximate appropriateness in this sense. Consider the following examples:

(26) a   een   windhoos-*achtig*   verschijnsel
         INDEF   hurricane-APPROX   phenomenon
         'a hurricane-like phenomenon'
     b   een   geel-*achtig*-e   jas
         INDEF   yellow-APPROX-AGR coat
         'a yellowish coat'
     c   een   Oprah-*achtig*   programma
         INDEF   Oprah-APPROX   programme
         'an Oprah-like programme'

In each of these cases the suffix –*achtig* indicates that the property expressed by the lexeme it is attached to only approximates the meaning the Speaker wants to convey.[3]
        English too tends to make use of grammaticalized (or possibly lexicalized) items to express this kind of qualification. Two different groups can be distinguished:

- free morphemes: *sort-of*/*kind-of*, *more or less*, *like*, etc. (see also Aijmer 2002, Keizer 2007)
- bound morphemes: -*ish*, -*y* , -*like*

On the whole, the free morphemes freely combine with any lexical category. *Sort of*, for instance, though typically used in combination with nominal lexemes, can also be used to qualify the applicability of properties denoted by verbs, adjectives, adverbs and prepositions (Hengeveld & Mackenzie 2008: 112). Some examples are given in (27):

(27) a   She had her hair *kind of down* in a *kind of* I don't know *net* <ICE-GB:S1A-037 #149:1:B>
     b   Aha, that's exactly what it feels like, you keep *sort of thinking*
     c   Don't you get the feeling that she's living there in that house, and the rest of it's *sort of derelict* or totally deserted <ICE-GB:S1A-023 #284:1:B>

The expression *more or less* turns out to be equally flexible in its application. The approximating expression *like*, on the other hand, seems to be used mainly in combination with verbs, adjectives and numerals:

(28) a   ... even comedy movies will have scenes of people running people off the road or running pedestrians down, and it's sort of, you know, *like* laughed at. (COCA)
     b   But, yeah a bit much uh I was quite I was quite kind of *like theoretical* about it <ICE-GB:S1A-034 #102:1:B>
     c   And so she really really looks like my dad though, and so does uhm, so does his other daughter who's *like eight* <ICE-GB:S1A-042 #357:1:B>

Finally, an approximating effect can be achieved by the use of such epistemic modality adverbs as *perhaps* and *maybe*, as illustrated in the following examples:

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[3] Note that –*achtig* has further, non-approximative uses.

(29)   a   It wasn't till I was *perhaps twenty-five or thirty* that I read them and enjoyed them <ICE-GB:S1A-013 #238:1:E>

        b   Basically you will listen for *maybe seven* minutes then you switch off (BNC)

Not surprisingly, the bound morphemes are more selective with regard to the syntactic category of the word they attach to: as approximation markers, *-like* attaches to nominal lexemes, while *-y* and *-ish* seem to require adjectival stems,[4] although, as shown by the following examples, they can be used quite creatively (and, in the case of *-ish*, almost as a free morpheme):

(30)   a   in a lot of other contact-based dance work you can actually cheat and not give your weight fully or uhm take weight fully, and it becomes a bit sort of *nothingy* … <ICE-GB:S1A-002 #131:2:B>

        b   A: Uh and then as you told us his uh, he he was interested in uh a business which was within a twenty-five mile radius of Hammersmith
               B: *Ish* yes <,>
               A: Well you didn't say *ish* earlier, you said twenty-five twenty-five mile radius <ICE-GB:S1B-064 #7:1:A>-<ICE-GB:S1B-064 #10:1:A>

        c   You know where I live *ish* <ICE-GB:S1A-017 #278:1:A>

4.4 Exact Ascriptive Subacts

Languages may also have lexical or grammatical means to achieve the opposite effect from approximation, i.e. to indicate that the properties ascribed apply exactly. A language in which exactness is highly grammaticalized is Leti. In this language there is an exactness clitic, the absence of which indicates approximate ascription. Thus we find the following oppositions:

Leti (Van Engelenhoven 2004: 160)
(31)   a   N-tivl=e.
             3.SG-flap=EXCT
             'It flaps.'
        b   N-tivla.
             3.SG-flap
             'It sort of flaps.'

In English exactness is indicated mainly through the use of certain adjectives, such as *real*, *true, right* and *proper*. Note that none of these expressions are used specifically for this purpose; their use as exactness markers is derived from their original (descriptive) use. When used as (IL) markers of exactness, however, these adjectives exhibit a number of specific syntactic features:

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[4] There are, of course, numerous (fully lexicalized) adjectives ending in *-y/-ish*, derived from nouns or verbs, like *hungry*, *sleepy*, *fishy*, *jumpy* or *touchy*, *feverish, sluggish* or *foolish*, which lack the meaning element of approximation.

1. they can only be used attributively (*true patriots* vs. **these patriots are true*);
2. they cannot themselves be modified (*an almost right answer* vs. **an almost right bastard*)
3. they cannot be negated at predicate level (*an untrue story* vs. **an untrue Hindu*);
4. they lack comparative/superlative forms (e.g. *a more proper subject* vs. **a more proper fool*).

Some examples of these adjectival lexemes (used as adjectival or adverbial words) can be found in (32):

(32) a A *true Hindu*, according to Gandhi, is one "who believes in God, immortality of the soul, transmigration, the law of Karma and Moksha, and who tries to practise Truth and Ahimsa in daily life …" (BNC)

  b "Nothing will change my commitment to the idea that a *truly liberal* education is much more than an examination syllabus," she says. (BNC)

  c "It was a terrible shock because he was a *real father figure* and taught us a lot. There's not a day goes by that we don't think of him." (BNC)

  d I've taken out jobs that er like er St Pancras roof which is erm a total of a large amount of money for scaffolding, but really it's not a *proper job*. (BNC)

In addition, the adverb *very* can be used as a marker of exactness, in which case it is (unprototypically) followed by a noun:

(33) a He was a tourist who had turned a corner at just the right time, spotting Willie at the *very* moment he slipped into the water. (COCA)

  b She must have mailed this the *very* day I left, he thought and wondered what it would say. (COCA)

5 Non-straightforward Referential Subacts

5.1 Introduction

In Section 4.1 we already commented upon the actional nature of reference. It is the speaker who refers by means of Referential Subacts to extralinguistic and intralinguistic entities that he wants to draw the addressee's attention to. The entities referred to are not necessarily concrete objects, as in (34), but may be of all possible kinds, such as properties, events, and propositional contents, as illustrated in (35) through (37) respectively:

(34) *That man* is my neighbour.
(35) I hate *that colour*.
(36) *Eating too much* is bad for your health.
(37) I don't agree with *what he thinks*.

In each of these cases the italicized part of the sentence corresponds with a Referential Subact at the Interpersonal Level.

5.2 Un(der)specified Referential Subacts

Un(der)specified Ascriptive Subacts were discussed in Section 4.2. Many of the expressions that were reviewed there can also be used to substitute a Referential Subact. This is the case when such an expression is used to replace a proper name, either because the speaker does not know or cannot remember the name, or to express a (negative) evaluation of the person referred to. The dummy expressions in these cases correspond to complete Referential Subacts at IL (with the dummy expression functioning as the lexical head of the Subact). The Dutch and Hup dummy words illustrated in (18) and (19) can also be used in this way, as illustrated in (38) and (39):

Dutch
(38)   Hé,   kijk, daar heb je   *Dinges*.
        hey   look   there have you   Thingummy
        'Hey look, there's Thingummy.'

Hup (Epps 2008: 715)
(39)   *hǎ̃y* -ăn   key-d'óʔ-ów-ay   ʔǎ̃h-ãw-ǎ̃h
        thingummy-OBJ   see-take-FLR-INCH   1.SG-FLR-DECL
        'I've caught a glimpse of What's-his-name.'

Languages may have specialized expressions for this function as well. Spanish, for instance, not only has a general dummy word for humans, *fulano*, but uses the extended version *Fulano de Tal* for dummy names, and unrelated expressions such as *Perico de los Palotes* for male referents and *Rita la Pollera* for female referents. The latter expressions actually illustrate underspecified rather than unspecified reference, as the expressions specialize for the high-level semantic classes of males and females.

   In English expressions like (unspecified) *thingummy*, *thingamajig*, *dingus and so-and-so*, as well as (underspecified) *whosis*, *whosit* and *whats(h)isname*, *whats(h)ername* are often (and in the case of underspecified dummy expression even typically) used in this function. In writing, these expressions are often spelled with a capital:

(40)   a   It was a wonderful night. *Thingummy* was there – you hadn't seen him for
            years. And what's-his-name was looking better than ever.
        b   He just had his picture taken by that famous photographer. *Whosis*. The guy
            who did Churchill.

In addition, these expressions can replace part of the proper name, and as such part of the head of the Referential Subact. An example from Dutch is given in (41); some examples from English can be found in (42).

Dutch
(41) Vorige week   kreeg   ik bericht van   de   firma
      last   week   got   I message from   the   firm
      Huppeldeflups (God   mag weten   wat   de   naam   is).
      Huppeldeflups (God   may know   what   the   name   is)
      'Last week I got a message from the Huppeldeflups company (God knows what
      their name is).'

(42) a   "How can you say that?" "Be logical, like your detective character …
           Norman *Thingummy*." "Nathan Latimer," Melissa corrected frostily. (BNC)
      b   What do you think about the new Bond, *whatsisname* Craig.
      c   The youngest ones were dazed and obedient, milling around in tufts of pink
           gauze with their eyes fixed trustingly on Madame *Whosit* in the wings.

Finally, it is interesting to see that many languages have fixed sequences of dummies
that can be used to refer to a group of underspecified referents. In Spanish one
encounters the sequence in (43), where only the order in (43a) is acceptable. A similar
example for English can be found in (44).

(43) a   Fulano, Mengano, Zutano y Perengano
      b   *Mengano, Fulano, Zutano y Perengano
      c   *Perengano, Fulano, Mengano y Zutano
           *etc.

(44) He wanted to confide in O'Hara, to get him on their side, but he didn't want
      every *Tom, Dick and Harry* knowing their business. (BNC)

5.3. Approximate Referential Subacts

Just like Ascriptive Subacts, Referential Subacts, too, may be qualified by expressions
of approximation, the difference being that in the latter case the approximative
expression has scope over a Referential Subact: the speaker indicates that the way he
refers to an entity is not entirely appropriate, not that a specific property predicated of
that entity is not expressed appropriately. Brazilian Portuguese provides an interesting
example of this type of approximation:

Brazilian Portuguese (Edson Souza, pers. comm.)
(45) Sinto   uma   coisa ruim   *aí*.
      I.feel   a   thing bad   there
      'I am sensing something bad.'

(46) Hoje   tô   muito feliz   devido   à   uns
      today   I.am   very   happy   due   to   some
      acontecimentos   *aí*.
      events   there
      'Today I am very happy due to certain things that happened.'

By attaching the particle *aí* 'there' to a noun phrase, the speaker indicates that he cannot or does not want to refer in more specific terms to the entity he is referring to. The scope of the particle is the noun phrase as a whole and not just one of the lexical elements contained in the noun phrase. This is particularly clear in example (45), where it is the combination *uma coisa ruim* 'a bad thing', including the modifier *ruim*, that is being qualified as an incomplete yet for the speaker sufficiently specific description of what he wants to refer to. The strategy involved seems particularly suitable to avoid explicit reference to unfortunate events that the speaker prefers not to describe in detail.

With respect to English, we gave examples in Section 4.3 of such modifying/qualifying devices as *sort of, more or less* and *like* when operating at the layer of the Ascriptive Act. The reasons for assuming they were operating at this level were both semantic (they seem to modify/qualify the appropriateness of assigning a particular property) and syntactic (their position suggests that they have scope over the Act of Ascription). For the very same reasons, however, the expressions *sort of/kind of, moreover* and *like* in the following examples may be taken to have scope over a Referential Act:

(47)   a   I think I can more or less understand in general terms what happens up until *sort of* the impressionist time, maybe just post-impressionist. (BNC)
       b   How do you think the kids will respond in later life to *kind of* the indoctrination that you're giving them now? (COCA)
       c   The quarks will be moving at *more or less* the speed of light (BNC)
       d   Well as I say you can't speak it because it hasn't actually got *like* a dictionary <ICE-GB:S1A-015 #210:1:A>

The difference between these examples and those in which the approximating expressions operate at the layer of the Ascriptive Act is that in the latter the speaker may have a clear idea of what the referent of the expression is, but simply lacks a straightforward means of describing or pinpointing it, whereas in the former case the speaker seems to be uncertain as to how to categorize the referent in the first place. Thus, in example (47a) the speaker refers somewhat vaguely to a period of time, described as 'the impressionist time', as opposed to the phrase *the sort of impressionist time*, where reference is made to a (specific) period of time, to which the property 'impressionist (time)' approximately applies.

Further examination of corpus data, however, shows that alongside the constructions "a sort/kind of N" and "sort/kind of an/the N" discussed so far, frequent use is made (in both spoken and written English) of the construction "ART sort/kind of ART N" (where there is no evidence that we are dealing with a repair mechanism). In by far the majority of cases both articles are indefinite, in which case the expression invariably has an approximative use:

(48)   a   Yes, well Eyre there stands as *a sort of a* paradigmatic modern philosopher, ... (BNC)
       b   There has been *a kind of a* collective amnesia about the way in which all of us ended up in this place called America. (COCA)
       c   The Milesian cosmologists, according to Karl Popper, " envisaged the world as *a kind of a* house, the home of all creatures -- our home " (Popper 1965, 141). (COCA - written)

The other three possible combinations of articles also occur, but far less frequently (in particular the sequence "a sort/kind of the N"). The examples in (49) all involve approximation:

(49) a You know, in the -- in' 93, and even to some extent in Bush' s election in 2000, there's *the sort of the* expectation that you get elected ... (COCA)
      b Oh, I had set for myself a goal like an accessory for my car. And I'm *the kind of a* car nut, so when reached that ... (COCA)
      c and have even heard him referred to *a sort of the Forrest Gump of terrorism*. (COCA)

In many cases, however, these last three combinations can only be given a referential (head-modifier) reading, as shown in (50):

(50) a That' s *the kind of the reports that you get about Demerol and OxyContin*. (COCA)
      b we appreciate that Howard Wilkinson isn't *the sort of a manager to make that decision without a lot of thought*. (BNC)
      c and I'll be the first to recognize that and this was just *a sort of the ball park stats that you were looking for*. (BNC)

This seems to throw doubt on the reliability of using the position of *sort of/kind of* vis-à-vis the following noun/NP as an indication of its scope. It may well be that, since the difference in meaning between the constructions "a sort/kind of N" and "sort/kind of an N" is so subtle, speakers themselves get confused and, rather than choosing one or the other, use a blend.

5.4 Exact Referential Subacts

We showed in 4.4 that Leti has an exactness clitic that, attached to a predicate, indicates that the speaker considers his Ascriptive Subact to be fully appropriate. The same clitic may attach to a noun phrase and then indicates that the noun phrase is fully appropriate:

Leti (van Engelenhoven 2004: 160)

(51) a   vuar=lalavn=e   b   vuar=lalavn
         big=mountain=EXCT   big=mountain
         'a big mountain'   'a sort of a big mountain'

In (51a) the exactness clitic is present, and has not only the head *lalavn* of the noun phrase in its scope, but the noun phrase as a whole, including the modifier *vuar*. The description *vuar=lalavn* as a whole is characterized as an adequate way of referring to the object the speaker has in mind. The absence of the exactness marker, as in (51b), characterizes the description as an approximate way of referring to the object the speaker has in mind.

English also seems to have lexical means to indicate that the Subact of Reference is to be interpreted as picking out exactly the right referent. In particular the

adverbs *really* and *truly* can be used in this way. In example (52a), for instance, it is not so much that the description provided truly applies, but that the referent (or set of potential referents) picked out on the basis of this description is exactly the referent (set) the speaker has in mind. Some further examples are given in (52b-e):

(52) a   Well, if we talk about genomics, I think it's going to be in *truly* the
            directions I've been trying to push things, (COCA)
      b   When you referred yesterday in your testimony to the House Banking
            Committee in Dallas to *truly* a national crisis, you were referring to what?
            (COCA)
      c   You're taking money from lower income people and moderate income
            people through their taxes and transferring it to *really* the most
            economically privileged people in our society. (COCA)
      d   I think you've come to *really* the wrong committee to try and get money.
            (BNC)
      e   we can nevertheless say that the historical and in-between states generally
            show greater prospects for political stability, democracy,
            institutionalization, and thus integration into Europe than those states that at
            present are struggling to create viable state structures and national
            institutions for *really* the first time. (COCA - written)

6 Non-straightforward Communicated Contents

6.1 Introduction

In FDG, the Communicated Content "contains the totality of what the Speaker wishes to evoke in his/her communication with the Addressee" (Hengeveld & Mackenzie 2008: 87). It consists of a varying number of Ascriptive and Referential Subacts. In searching for non-straightforward Communicated Contents we are thus interested in strategies by means of which the speaker qualifies the message contained in a Discourse Act as a whole. These strategies do indeed exist, and display the same degrees of non-straightforwardness as the ones relevant for Ascriptive and Referential Subacts.

6.2 Un(der)specified Communicated Contents

There are situations in which speakers do not express a Communicated Content but simply insinuate it by using a dummy filler. Dutch, for instance, has at least one dedicated element, *bladibla*, for this function, as illustrated in (53) and (54):

(53) Deze   mensen pasten   niet   meer   in het   team enz. enz. *bladibla*.
      these people fit   not   longer in the   team etc. etc. blahblah
      'These people didn't fit in the team anymore, etc. etc. blah blah.'
(54) Kijk, met mij gaat t ellendig, want   *bladibla*.
      look   with me   goes it terrible, because blahblah
      'Look, I am not doing well at all, because blah blah.'

In (53) the word *bladibla* substitutes for information provided by someone else deemed to be totally irrelevant by the current speaker; in (54) the speaker indicates that there are reasons for what is claimed in the main clause, but that he does not want to comment on these.

English also has a number of expressions that can be used to express an entire Communicated Content, the most frequently used of which are *so-and-so*, *such-and-such* and *blah-blah-blah*. As can be seen from the following examples, these expressions are often used as complements of verbs of *saying* and *thinking*:

(55)　a　If I were to turn to a man on a bench Mm. and say to him *so and so and so and so* he'd always answer back and say I want to do it this way (BNC)
　　　b　If I see this and if I see that, then that means something else, and that something else taken in conjunction with something else that I see might suggest *so and so, and so on*. (BNC)
　　　c　Well, what if so and so said *such and such*? (COCA)
　　　d　Consisting of animated crayon drawings, grotesque in the fashion of "The Simpsons," it is narrated by a young son who describes his father as a domineering, unlikable guy who's always going "*blah blah blah*."
　　　e　He just wasn't in the mood for one of those sentimental reflections on the joyous season -- love your enemy, good will to all, *blah blah blah*.

6.3 Approximate Communicated Contents

Approximation, too, can take place at layers higher than that of the T- or R-Act. Qualifying a Communicated Content as approximate is particularly common when it is reported from another source. Thus, in many languages there are special quotative constructions that convey that the reported Communicated Content is an approximation of what was actually said (see van Alphen & Buchstaller fc.). The following example is from Dutch (Hengeveld 1994):

(56)　Ik　had　*zoiets*　　*van*　ze　bekijken　het　maar!
　　　I　had　something　like　they　look_at　it　but
　　　'I was like the hell with them.'

The complementizing expression *zoiets van* in Dutch indicates that the quoted message should not be taken literally, but as an approximation of what could have been said.

In English, too, there are various expressions with such a function, as can be seen from the examples in (57), where it seems to be the entire Communicated Contents that are being qualified:

(57)　a　Britney, Madonna to appear together ... *sort of* (Google)
　　　b　McCain backtracks on gay adoption, *sort of*. (Google)
　　　c　I thought if people would feel sorry for me, then I wouldn't be able to cope with this thing, *like*. (BNC)
　　　d　How did you help out? Well, I was like the rest, I'd got to help out standing at the stalls, *like*. (BNC)

However, interpreting the real function of the italicized expressions here, and, consequently, the layer at which they operate, turns out to be difficult for two reasons. First, the flexibility of these expressions, in terms of position in the utterance, may make it difficult to decide which part of the utterance is being modified. Consider in this respect the following examples with *like*:

(58)   a   I'd go to the Robins one because I mean that *like* kicks it off <ICE-GB:S1A-005 #52:1:A>

       b   But does he does he not just *like* write for himself <ICE-GB:S1A-015 #148:1:B>

       c   And it's *like* this smell that's *like* really great <ICE-GB:S1A-085 #34:1:B>

Examples (58a)-(58b) are problematic in that *like* here seems to modify a string that does not form a constituent at IL, while in the (58c) it is difficult to determine which part of the sentence *like* modifies to start with.

      A second source of confusion is the fact that the very same expressions are often used as mitigators rather than approximators (see also Aijmer 2002: 192-206). In the following example, for instance, *like* might be interpreted either as indicating that the lexical means chosen are not exactly describing the entity referred to, or as a means to weaken the impact of the lexemes chosen to convey the message (in which case it might be argued to function at the level of the Illocution; see Hengeveld & Keizer in prep.):

(59)   Remember this winter, when you were feeling so down and you *like* went mental and destroyed all your appliances and ripped out your hair (COCA)

In other cases, *like* seems to have neither an approximating nor a mitigating function, as in example (58):

(60)   I've got a s a seminar on ISDN, a whole day with *like* dinner thrown in the middle <ICE-GB:S1A-030 #38:1:A>

What these examples seem to have in common, however, is that *like* functions as a kind of focus marker. Dailey-O'Cain (2000: 61-62) lists the six different positions which, according to Underhill (1988: 243-244), focuser *like* can take, and adds that 'Focuser *like* cannot, however, occur in every instance of these six possible positions, but only in cases where the linguistic item *like* precedes new information within the discourse'. Schourop (1985: 38-39) also notes that focuser *like* is particularly common before numerical expressions, such as "I'm like six feet tall". Although it is true that the information *six feet tall* is presumably the new information in this sentence, this does not necessarily mean that *like* here functions as a focuser: since English is characterized by End-Focus, the final position in itself may be enough to mark this information as new. In that case *like* can be seen as having an approximating function. This once again shows that distinguishing between the different functions of *like* is not always easy.[5]

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[5] In addition, *be like* is increasingly used as a quotative, as in *He was like "stop it already."* (e.g. Robles 2007).

6.4 Exact Communicated Contents

Communicated Contents as a whole can also be characterized as being an exact representation of what the speaker has in mind. Leti, a language that marks exactness in Ascriptive and Referential Subacts, also allows for the characterization of entire Communicated Contents as such. The following pair of examples shows this:

Leti (van Engelenhoven 2004: 161)

(61) R-vèvla=e   masa=e=la   karsa=e=di   n-mòka=e.
      3.PL-forge=EXCT   gold=EXCT=DIR   *karsa*=EXCT=DCTC   3.SG-good=EXCT
      'Their actual forging the gold into a/the *karsa* is good.'

(62) R-vèvla=masa=la   karsa=e=di   n-mòka=e.
      3.PL-forge=gold=DIR   *karsa*=EXCT=DCTC   3.SG-good=EXCT
      'It would be good if they would forge the gold into a/the *karsa.*'

In (61) all constituents are marked with the exactness clitic, which leads to an interpretation in which the speaker is fully committed to the Communicated Content. In (62), the absence of the exactness clitic on the embedded clause leads to an uncertainty reading.

When we consider the possibility of expressing exactness at the layer of the Communicated Content in English, we are faced with more or less the same problems as identified in the previous section for expressing approximation at this layer. Thus, where elements like *sort of* and *like* can have both an approximating and a mitigating function, adverbs like *really* and *truly* can be used to express reinforcement (of the Illocution) rather than exactness (for further discussion see Hengeveld & Keizer, in prep.). In (63a), for instance, *really* seems to strengthen the speaker's commitment to the appropriateness of the suggested course of action, while in (63b-c) it appears to be the declarative force of the Discourse Act is reinforced:

(63) a   You *really* should check those. (BNC)
      b   He died in poverty. So he *really* suffered for that vote.
      c   It hurt. It *really* did hurt. And it still hurts.

An additional problem is that these adverbs, when they can be assumed to apply to the Communicated Content at all, typically have their original, descriptive meaning, as in the following examples:

(64) a   Can it *really* soften wrinkles, take years off your face?
      b   The situation is that people that *truly* want help can't get it.

7 Conclusion

On the basis of the examples discussed in this paper, we conclude that marking (various degrees of) non-straightforwardness, lexically and/or grammatically, is a pervasive

feature of languages, whereby some languages (like English) have a whole range of expressions to convey each of the three degrees of non-straightforwardness distinguished. We have argued that, since by marking different degrees of non-straightforwardness a Speaker indicates the extent to which he is able to (or willing to) provide the exact amount of information needed for successful or felicitous communication, we are dealing with a pragmatic notion, to be dealt with at the Interpersonal Level.

In addition, we hope to have shown that the notion of non-straightforwardness is relevant not only at the layer of the Ascriptive Subact, but that it applies equally in the field of reference and at the layer of the Communicated Content as a whole. It would be worthwhile to see to what extent these distinctions are relevant at other layers of the Interpersonal Level (the Illocution or the Discourse Act) as well. However, since the same expressions are often used to mark non-straightforwardness at the different layers, it is no always easy to determine to which level these expressions apply. For the same reason, it turns out to be difficult to distinguish between approximation/exactness on the one hand and mitigation/reinforcement on the other.

Nevertheless, we hope to have demonstrated that the layers and levels distinguished in FDG provide a useful heuristic tool to define and locate the fine-grained distinctions between the various scopes of the strategies studied.

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