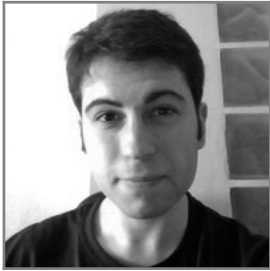


WHEN THAT F IS NOT F. INTERPRETABILITY, DEIXIS AND COMPLEX DEMONSTRATIVES

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In this paper I defend two claims regarding complex demonstratives (noun phrases of the form “that F”). On the one hand I argue that, when one of these expressions misdescribes the referred object (i.e., when such object is not F), the right semantic analysis is to treat the expression as uninterpretable. On the other, I claim that the uninterpretability thesis finds itself in trouble when it comes to dealing with *non-deictic* uses of complex demonstratives, i.e., uses of “that F” in which the speaker has no acquaintance or direct perception of any object that could satisfy the predicative material. In order to make these two claims compatible, I set out to modify the way the uninterpretability thesis has been traditionally formulated.

Keywords: demonstration, complex demonstratives, deixis, acquaintance

КОГДА «ЭТО F» НЕ ЯВЛЯЕТСЯ F. ИНТЕРПРЕТИРУЕМОСТЬ, ДЕЙКСИС И СЛОЖНЫЕ ДЕМОНСТРАТИВЫ

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В этой статье я защищаю два утверждения относительно сложных демонстративов (именных фраз вида «это F»). С одной стороны, я хочу показать, что, когда один из компонентов такого выражения неверно характеризует объект (который не является F), при должном семантическом анализе выражение должно рассматриваться как неинтерпретируемое. С другой стороны, я утверждаю, что тезис о неинтерпретируемости приводит к затруднению, когда речь идет о недейктических употреблениях сложных демонстративов, т.е. таких, когда «это F» используется говорящим в отношении объекта, который ему не знаком, непосредственно им не воспринимается, но может удовлетворять предикату F. Чтобы совместить эти два утверждения, я модифицирую традиционную формулировку тезиса о неинтерпретируемости.

Ключевые слова: демонстрация, сложные демонстративы, дейксис, знакомство



1. Introduction

Complex demonstratives (noun phrases like “this man” or “those people”) result from the combination of a demonstrative determiner and a nominal. As such, they are capable of referring to an object while at the same time describing it. This dual nature raises a number of issues concerning their felicitous usage. Imagine I mistake a dog for a cat and utter (1):

(1) That cat is on my mat.

Since I misperceived (and misdescribed) the animal, one may wonder whether the demonstrative “that cat” managed to refer, and ultimately whether any proposition was expressed. The proposals in the market are exhaustive: a well-established view [Borg, 2000; Salmon, 2002; Glanzberg & Siegel, 2006] denies that (1) is interpretable, whereas other authors would convene that a proposition was expressed, but they would disagree on whether it is true [Larson & Segal, 1995], false [Richard, 1993; Lepore & Ludwig, 2000; King, 2001] or gappy [Braun, 1994; Braun, 2008].

My aim is to argue in favor of the uninterpretability of (1). And, even though this idea is relatively standard and has been thoroughly defended by many other authors [cf. Glanzberg & Siegel, 2006], in this paper I advance two novelties which, to my knowledge, have not been discussed at depth by any author. On the one hand, I provide a novel argument that exploits the metalinguistic nature of the uninterpretability thesis, and which can be used for deciding between this view and the idea that (1) expresses a gappy proposition (two analyses which are often taken to be equivalent). On the other, I connect this debate with the existence of *non-deictic uses of complex demonstratives* [King, 2001; Nowak, 2014; Nowak, 2021a; Nowak, 2021b], i.e., utterances of these expressions in which the speaker has no sort of acquaintance or direct perception of the object (if any) that she intends to talk about. I do all this in section 2.

In section 3, however, I argue that the traditional formulation of the uninterpretability thesis runs into trouble when it comes to dealing with non-deictic uses of complex demonstratives. And in section 4 I provide a modified version of uninterpretability that manages to handle such troubling uses. As we shall see, the solution is to dispose of the idea that contexts should contain *demonstrata*, i.e., objects that are somehow more salient because of their relation to the utterer.



2. Uninterpretability and Its Rivals

2.1. *The Pragmatic Role View*

Concerning examples like (1), in which the nominal (“cat”) does not match the referred object, most semantic theories convene that the utterance cannot be true – it may be false, it may be gappy or it may be uninterpretable, but at any rate not true. However, the opposite idea is tentatively endorsed by Larson and Segal [1995], on whose approach the nominal of a complex demonstrative does not play any semantic role, but serves merely as a pragmatic aid that helps the hearer identify the intended object.¹ Let me call this the “*pragmatic role view*” (PRV). On such approach, (1) and (1a) are just equivalent:

(1a) That is on my mat.

Since the truth of (1a) does not require the referent of “that” to satisfy any property besides being on the mat, and since PRV treats (1) as nothing but an embellished version of (1a), the conclusion is that (1) can be true as long as the referred individual (the dog) is on the mat, regardless of its lack of *catness*. Notice in fact that, in this proposal, *all nominals* of *all* complex demonstratives turn out to be equivalent, for they are all semantically vacuous. Thus, both (1) and (1a) would be synonymous with the perfectly felicitous (1b):

(1b) That *dog* is on my mat.

This in turn means that the infelicity in examples like (1) is *merely pragmatic* and bears no semantic effects on the interpretability or the truth of the sentence.

However, *non-deictic uses* of complex demonstratives pose serious trouble to the idea that the nominal of a complex demonstrative has no semantic role to play. The most extreme case of non-deictic demonstratives are the ones that King [1999; 2001] dubs “*quantifying-in uses*” (QI):

(2) [Every queen]₁ cherishes that cleric who crowned her₁.

This sentence is true iff, for every queen x , x cherishes that y such that y is a cleric and y crowned x . The pronoun *her* is functioning, semantically, as a bound variable, and this means that, in order for the higher quantifier “every queen” to be able to bind it, the nominal “cleric who crowned her” just cannot be a mere pragmatic clue. On the contrary, the fact that we are able to operate on it indicates that its contribution must be fully semantic. It is indeed very implausible to treat the nominal

¹ Arguably, this is too the right interpretation of the later Kaplan [1989b, pp. 571–572].



in (2) as *equivalent to any other nominal*. Clearly, (2a) can never mean the same as (2):

(2a) Every queen cherishes that dog.

These facts suggest a diagnosis of what went wrong with PRV: these theories somehow presuppose that, in order to employ a demonstrative, the utterer must be perceiving the referred object. Under this supposition, it is rather natural to assume that the role of the noun is simply to guide the hearer in trying to find the intended object. But cases like (2), in which perception of *all clerics* is humanly impossible, suggest otherwise.

Notice, however, that we need not resort to such extreme cases as QI: demonstratives, in general, can be employed with no acquaintance of any object whatsoever. Consider the following scenario, adapted from King [2001]. A few days after a very tough exam, Greg overhears a fellow classmate exclaiming that there is a student who scored one hundred on it. Reflecting on his own about the difficulty of the test, Greg tells to himself:

(3) That student who scored one hundred on the exam is a genius.

This kind of scenarios, in which there is no object in sight that the utterer may intend to talk about, pose a serious threat to PRV. These approaches make sense in scenarios like (1) above, in which it may be plausibly argued that the utterer's gestures, her intentions or her perceptual focus on an object trump her choice of words, thus being able to settle a dog as the referent in spite of having used the nominal "cat". But cases like (3), in which the nominal is *the only available clue*, make it implausible to treat "student who scored one hundred" as semantically equivalent to any other nominal.

2.2. The False Content View

A natural step once we acknowledge that the nominal must play a semantic role is to treat sentences like (1) as false in the above context. After all, this sentence conveys that the referred object is a cat. This is the idea behind theories like Richard's [1993], Lepore and Ludwig's [2000] or King's [2001]: all of them treat the nominal as a contribution to *propositional content*, so that an utterance of (1) would assert of the referred object both that it is a cat and that it is on the mat. Thus, such utterance would count as false. Let me therefore call this the "*false content view*" (FCV).

Let me work with a modified example for this case. Imagine I see Angela Merkel wearing a jacket, but I mistake it for a coat and utter (4) while gesturing towards her:

(4) That woman with a coat looks sympathetic.



According to FCV, an utterance of this sentence in such scenario expresses a false proposition. And the problem with this kind of theories appears when we embed these sentences under the scope of a modal operator. Imagine that instead of utter (4) I utter (4a):

(4a) Emmanuel believes that that woman with a coat looks sympathetic.

In these theories, the role of a sentence like (4a) is to attribute to Emmanuel belief in a false proposition, namely in the proposition expressed by (4). I.e., (4a) should be true if Emmanuel believes the false content expressed by (4), and false otherwise. And the problem that I intend to pose to FCV is that, in this context, (4a) is wrong *regardless of whether Emmanuel holds a true or a false belief*. In order to see why, notice that, in such scenario, it makes a lot of sense for my interlocutor to correct my utterance by saying (4b):

(4b) No, Emmanuel does not believe that that woman *with a coat* is sympathetic, he believes that that woman *with a jacket* is sympathetic.

The fact that this correction makes sense indicates one of two things: either my interlocutor is correcting my attribution of a false belief to Emmanuel (say, because Emmanuel does not hold false beliefs of any kind about Merkel) or she might be simply correcting my choice of words – i.e., this is a case of *metalinguistic negation* [Horn, 1985]. Thus, the former kind of correction concerns the content of my utterance, whereas the latter, on the contrary, means that my mistake in uttering (4a) was linguistic in nature. And here is the main point: unless the correction is addressed at the content of my utterance, it makes no sense to say that the proposition attributed to Emmanuel (the one expressed by (4)) is false.

Before developing this argument, let me provide a brief explanation of what metalinguistic negation is about. This phenomenon can be exemplified by sentences like those in (5)–(8):

(5) I did not meet *a woman*. I met *my wife*.

(6) We don't *like* L.A. We *love* it.

(7) Fred does not *regret failing* the exam. He *passed* it.

(8) Mary has not *stopped smoking*. She has *never smoked*.

Examples like (5) or (6) are composed of two sentences, the first of which denies that a certain fact *p* is the case while the second, in turn, asserts another fact *q*. But notice an important fact: in these examples, *q* entails *p*. If somebody meets her wife, she meets a woman, and anybody who loves L.A. also likes it. Thus, these examples should strike us as *prima facie* self-contradictory. As for (6)–(7), the situation is similar, albeit more complex. Both of them are composed of two sentences, the first of which contains a verbal construction which is being negated and which



usually triggers a *presupposition*: the use of “regret failing” and “stop smoking” presuppose, respectively, that Fred failed the exam and that Mary used to smoke. And these presuppositions, in turn, are also under the scope of a negation in the second sentence of each pair.

The usual thesis for explaining what is going on in these examples is a pragmatic one: namely, that the word “not” is not being used for denying the *literal content* of the sentences under its scope, but rather for *correcting the choice of words* – hence the name “metalinguistic negation”. An utterance of “Tom likes L.A.” may lead the hearer to infer, through Grice’s [1961; 1975] Maxim of Quantity, that Tom merely likes, and does not love, the city; thus, someone who knows that Tom does love L.A. may utter (6) in response, not in order to deny that Tom likes L.A., but simply as a way to suggest a better wording for what her interlocutor intended to convey – namely, a wording that avoids the implicature that Tom *merely likes* it. Similarly, saying “Fred does not regret failing the exam” triggers a presupposition to the effect that Fred failed it, and by uttering (7) in response what is corrected is not the assertion concerning Fred’s regrets, but rather the choice of a word which triggers a false presupposition.

Presuppositions play an important metasemantic role, for they are usually conceived as a prerequisite for an utterance to receive a truth-value [cf. Strawson, 1950]. And, indeed, most theorists of uninterpretability treat the contribution of the nominal as presuppositional [cf. Borg, 2000; Salmon, 2002; Larson & Siegel, 2006; see footnote 2]. Regardless of the particular details of such approaches, this points towards an important conclusion: if the correction in (4b) is a case of metalinguistic negation, then the mistake of the utterer of (4a) should still be a mistake *regardless of the truth or falsity of her utterance*. If, on the contrary, the mistake were a matter of content, i.e., if the problem with (4a) were, simply, that it is false, then (4b) should not apply to utterances of the former in which it is true.

Here is a modified example that shows that what is going on in (4b) is better explained along the lines of metalinguistic negation. Imagine that Emmanuel mistakenly believes that Merkel is wearing a coat, and he also thinks of her as a sympathetic person. If so, theorists of FCV should have no reason to deny that Emmanuel believes the content expressed by (4). Thus, an utterance of (4a) in such scenario should be just fine, for, according to FCV, it truly attributes a false belief to Emmanuel and contains no linguistic mistake whatsoever. And the problem is that, even in this situation, *a correction along the lines of (4b) is still in place*. This shows that such correction does not concern a wrong belief attribution to the subject. Namely, (4) cannot be false: if that were the case, it would be false for the same reasons that Emmanuel’s belief is false too, and (4a), which attributes to him belief in the proposition expressed by (4), would therefore constitute a perfectly appropriate way to report his beliefs. It would therefore make no sense to correct (4a) along the lines of (4b).



Rather, it seems that what the latter utterance is correcting is a linguistic mistake, namely a wrong choice of words for characterizing Merkel – and the subsequent triggering of a wrong presupposition.

Notice, in fact, that such correction *only makes sense if we are dealing with complex demonstratives*. If Emmanuel believes that Merkel is wearing a coat and I utter (4c) instead of (4a), an answer like (4d) would be completely inappropriate in spite of being entirely analogous to (4b):

(4c) Emmanuel believes that a woman with a coat is sympathetic.

(4d) No, Emmanuel does not believe that a woman with a coat is sympathetic, he believes that a woman with a jacket is sympathetic.

The contrast between the pairs (4a)–(4b) and (4c)–(4d) shows that, whenever the contribution of “woman with a coat” does occur at the level of content, as it uncontroversially does in (4c), no such kind of correction is in place”.² Thus, the general moral appears to be that the role of

² More generally, notice an important contrast between complex demonstratives and other noun phrases consisting of a determiner plus a nominal: the former, unlike the latter, do not usually generate double readings when they occur under the scope of modal or temporal operators. Consider the case of *definite descriptions*:

- (a) The first woman to climb Mount Everest could have been European.
- (b) The president of Canada will visit California.

These two sentences generate both a *de re* and a *de dicto* reading. Sentence (a), for example, can be read as a statement regarding Junko Tabei’s nationality (there is a unique x such that x is a woman who first climbed the Everest, and it could have been the case that x is European) or as a purely general claim (it could have been the case that there were a unique x such that x was a woman who first climbed the Everest, and that x were European). *Mutatis mutandis*, (b) yields two analogous readings: it can be made true either by Trudeau’s visiting California in the future (perhaps when he is not president anymore) or by the fact that some future president of Canada will visit that very state.

It is generally convened, however, that complex demonstratives like the one in (4a) do not generate ambiguities of this kind [cf. Richard, 1993, p. 220; Braun, 1994; Braun, 2008; Borg, 2000; Gimeno-Simó, 2021b, pp. 108–109]. Examples like (c) and (d) below differ from (a) and (b) in that they cannot be read *de dicto*:

- (c) That bald man could have had hair.
- (d) Tomorrow that married woman will be single.

These sentences have no contradictory reading, i.e., no reading to the effect that it could have been the case that a certain man had at once the properties of having hair and being bald, or that tomorrow a woman will be both married and single. This is equivalent to saying that the nominal of a complex demonstrative is generally *opaque to modal quantification*. The moral for our examples is, of course, that the intensional verbs in (4a) and (4b) won’t be able to operate on the nominal of the demonstrative. And, since this kind of verbs take content as their argument, what the correction in (4b) is addressed at cannot be the content of (4a). This means that whatever is wrong with the nominal, it must take place at a different level –



the nominal of a complex demonstrative, as opposed to the nominal of quantifiers like “a”, is not to contribute a certain content (true or false) to the proposition expressed. Rather, the fact that it is subject to corrections of metalinguistic nature suggests that it should be attributed a different role, presumably as something whose satisfaction enables the proposition to come to existence in the first place – just as defenders of uninterpretability hold. And, as we shall see in the next subsection, a variant of this argument can be applied to the fourth view in the dispute: the *gappy content view* (GCV).

2.3. The Gappy Content View

The two options we are left with are the idea that (1) or (4) fail to express any content in the above contexts and the view according to which they do express propositions, with the peculiarity that they are neither true or false, as Braun [1994, p. 218; 2008] maintains. And here the matters get fuzzier, for these two options are, to a large extent, terminological variants of each other. Notice, for example, that the issue cannot be settled by appealing to the truth or falsity of the above sentences in the contexts we envisaged in the previous sections.

These two theories do nevertheless yield slightly different predictions under certain circumstances. Consider (9):

(9) Jean believes that that square root of minus 2 is a cool number.

Proponents of uninterpretability are committed to saying that this sentence is, simply, uninterpretable: since it contains an uninterpretable term, the embedded sentence “that square root of minus 2 is a cool number” fails to express a proposition, which means that the intensional verb “believe”, which operates on propositions, has no argument to combine with and can therefore return no value. However, advocates of gappy contents can hold either of two different views:

- a) Whenever an intensional verb operates on a gappy proposition, the result is another proposition which is in turn gappy.
- b) People may have beliefs about gappy propositions. If so, nothing should prevent sentences of the form “*a* believes that *p*”, where *p* represents a gappy proposition, from receiving a truth value.

presumably, at a metalinguistic one. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting that the current discussion could be connected to the *de re/de dicto* ambiguity.

Things are a bit more complex, however, for it has been recently pointed out that complex demonstratives like the ones in (2) or (3), which contain a relative clause, do display a behavior more akin to definite descriptions and other combinations of a determiner plus a nominal [cf. Gimeno-Simó, 2021a, pp. 191–196, § 3.3.5.2; Nowak, 2021b].



Of course, option (a) just amounts to making GCV a terminological variant of uninterpretability: all the sentences that count as gappy on the former option turn out to be uninterpretable on the latter. Option (b), on the contrary, allows for (9) to be false or even true, depending on whether Jean holds a belief towards the gappy content expressed by the embedded sentence. If proponents of gappy contents manage to come up with some argument showing that there can be beliefs that are neither true or false, then the latter path appears to be the right option to take. Let me call this the “gappy beliefs existence view” (GBEV).

And the problems of GBEV are, essentially, the same as those of FCV. Consider Emmanuel’s scenario: if he believes that Merkel is wearing a coat and thinks that she is sympathetic, then champions of GBEV should convene that he believes the gappy proposition expressed by (4), whatever that might be. As a consequence, they should also convene that there is nothing wrong with (4a) – if it is interpretable, it is also true. And the problem is that, even in this case, *correcting the speaker’s utterance by means of (4b) is still a perfectly appropriate thing for the hearer to do*. If defenders of GBEV were right, such correction should not apply to this case. Quite the contrary, the fact that this correction is perfectly appropriate strongly suggests that the mistake in (4a) was linguistic in nature, as defenders of uninterpretability hold.

At the bottom of this issue, and concerning both versions of GCV, I think that there is a fundamental problem pertaining to the very notion of *proposition*. *Qua* theoretical entities, propositions are supposed to fulfill at least three roles [cf. Soames, 2014]: they are the objects that can be true or false, they are the meaning of declarative sentences and they are the object of intensional verbs and adverbs like “believe”, “say” or “possibly”. Proponents of gappy contents are depriving propositions of at least one of their defining traits – perhaps even two of them, for, if option (a) is true, then there are some propositions about which we can never truly say that they are believed by anyone. If a certain object fails to satisfy one or even two of these roles, what is the point of calling it a “proposition”? And, perhaps more relevantly, what is the point of making that object count as the meaning of sentences like (1), (4) or (9) in the devised contexts? So, even under the assumption that GCV can be formulated as a terminological variant of uninterpretability, the ball is still in the court of the defender of the former, for she still needs to find some way to motivate such a radical departure from the traditional notion of *proposition*.

In light these facts, I believe it is safe to conclude that uninterpretability is the right option when it comes to failure of satisfaction of the nominal of a complex demonstrative. Namely, it captures the intuitive fact that what is wrong with examples like (1), (4) or (9) has nothing to do with their content, but rather with the very linguistic form employed, thereby explaining that a correction in metalinguistic terms can serve as a perfectly appropriate response in those cases. Thus, it treats the mistake in those



examples as equivalent to pointing at a man and uttering “she”. But, of course, this idea is not devoid of problems, so let me now discuss an important challenge that can be posed to theories of uninterpretability: what happens when there is no acquaintance or perception of any *demonstratum* and there is therefore no way to tell whether it satisfies the nominal.

3. Non-Deictic Uses as a Problem for Uninterpretability

Above I argued that non-deictic uses of complex demonstratives pose a problem to PRV. Sentences like (2) or (3) are perfectly felicitous in the contexts envisaged above, and yet, since there is no object around to be acquainted with or to have direct perception of, the defender of PRV can find no way of arriving at the right proposition. But notice that a variant of this problem can be posed to uninterpretability, too. For one thing, the typical lexical entry that defenders of uninterpretability postulate also requires that there be an object which can count as the *demonstratum*.

Let me introduce a couple of technical notions in order to make my claims clearer. The basic framework that defenders of uninterpretability tend to work with is Kaplan’s [1989a; 1989b] influential theory of indexicality [cf. Borg, 2000; Salmon, 2002]. In this framework, contexts are understood as collections of parameters containing everything that may be relevant for settling the value of indexical expressions; for the purposes of this essay, we may assume that each context c consists of an agent a_c , a possible world w_c , a location l_c and a *demonstratum* d_c . The first three of these parameters serve, respectively, as the values for the words “I”, “actually” and “here” when these are interpreted in c , whereas the latter parameter, in turn, should be used for modelling the functioning of complex demonstratives. More concretely, defenders of uninterpretability tend to postulate a lexical entry like the following [Borg, 2000; Salmon, 2002]:³

- (10) For every context c , “that F” refers to an object α in c iff
- i) $\alpha = d_c$ and
 - ii) α satisfies F in w_c .

Whenever any of the conditions in (10) is not met, “that F” fails to refer, and the whole sentence in which it is contained becomes uninterpretable – i.e., infelicitous. But notice one thing: in this lexical entry,

³ In more precise terms, (10) should be formulated as $\llbracket \text{that} \rrbracket = \lambda c. \lambda w. \lambda P: P(w_c)(d_c) = 1. d_c$, where c , w and P are variables for contexts, worlds and properties, respectively. Notice that this amounts to treating the contribution of the nominal as a semantic presupposition [cf. Heim & Kratzer, 1998, §4].



conditions (i) and (ii) are *strictly on a par*. And this symmetry is, precisely, the most important feature of (10) that I intend to oppose.

Take a case like (3). It seems rather clear that, in the envisaged scenario, *there is no demonstratum whatsoever*. So, on the most naïve interpretation of (10i), (3) should come out as uninterpretable in such setting, in spite of the fact that it constitutes a perfectly felicitous utterance. This is so because the lack of a *demonstratum* is on a par with the failure to satisfy (10ii) in cases like (1).

Of course, there are alternatives. Perhaps the reasonable thing to do is to adopt a loose notion of *demonstratum*, one that does not require the speaker to be acquainted with any object or to be perceiving it at the moment of the utterance. Arguably, this is *not* the way the above authors intended their theories to be understood: for instance, when Salmon [2002] spells out the details of his proposal, he requires the speaker to perform some sort of demonstration in order for the object to be selected by the term. But, at any rate, it is possible to devise alternative, looser notions of *demonstratum* that enable us to say that Greg abides by clause (10i) when he utters (3).

Prima facie, this could do. However, this would only lead us to yet another problem with non-deictic uses, one which, on my view, is inescapable. As long as your theory includes focus on a *demonstratum*, no matter how much you decide to loosen the notion: the predicted truth-conditions for QI-sentences are going to be plainly wrong. Consider (2):

(2) [Every queen]₁ cherishes that cleric who crowned her₁.

The prediction that (10) yields about the truth conditions for this sentence is that it will be true in a context *c* iff a certain individual, *d_c*, is cherished by every queen, under the presupposition that *d_c* is a cleric that did all the crownings in the world *w_c* of the context. Needless to say, these truth-conditions do not capture the intuitive meaning of (2): there is no unique cleric who did all that, but rather one for each queen.⁴ Thus, it seems that theories of uninterpretability do not cope well with non-deictic uses of complex demonstratives in general, QI or not.

⁴ An anonymous referee argues that perhaps some sort of binding into the demonstrative could solve the problem. But, clearly, this cannot be the whole story, and the formal rendering of (10) that I provided in footnote 3 can help us see why. Namely, the Kaplanian character that this entry predicts for (2) is the following: $\lambda c: [\forall x: x \text{ is a queen in } w_c] (d_c \text{ crowned } x \text{ in } w_c). \lambda w. [\forall x: x \text{ is a queen in } w] (x \text{ cherishes } d_c \text{ in } w)$. The result are the deviant truth-conditions described above. Of course, the problem is that the demonstrative is anchored to a unique individual, namely *d_c* (for each context *c*). And this is precisely what I set out to solve in the next section: I provide a version of this lexical entry that disposes of anchoring into any individual.



4. Towards a Solution

The facts above points towards a certain diagnosis: the problem is that, when (10) was first formulated, what its defenders had in mind were mostly *deictic* uses, i.e. those in which a *demonstratum* is clearly in sight. But non-deictic uses of complex demonstratives show that these expressions can be employed even when there is no object in the environment that we can regard as such. Thus, they are faced with exactly the same problem as champions of PRV.

Now, one might wonder whether there is any motivation to keep the source of the problem, namely condition (10i), as part of our lexical entry. Arguably, there are none: the very notion of *demonstratum* has recently come under attack by authors like Predelli [2012] and Nowak [2021b], who argue, respectively, that it ends up overgenerating logical truth and that it is both psychologically unrealistic and semantically redundant.⁵ Let me therefore dispose of such clause. Rather than saying that the sentence is uninterpretable in case the *demonstratum* fails to satisfy the nominal, we should formulate uninterpretability as a thesis to the effect that, if *no appropriate parameter in the context* satisfies the nominal, then the sentence turns out to be uninterpretable. And, of course, this is independent of whether those parameters count as *demonstrata*.

I have argued elsewhere [Gimeno-Simó, 2021a] that what the right lexical entry for complex demonstratives needs to resort on is a *choice function* ranging over properties and returning individuals satisfying those very properties. This proposal was originally silent about the debate between uninterpretability and its competitors, for it was only intended as a way to handle QI-uses, but I believe it can be used for solving the challenge that non-deictic uses pose to uninterpretability.

The details of the proposal rely on one key element: instead of a *demonstratum* d_c , what each context should contain is a function $\delta_c: P \rightarrow D$, where P is the set of properties (functions from possible worlds to sets of objects) and D is the domain of quantification, such that, for every p in P , $\delta_c(p)$ satisfies P in w_c . And here is the new lexical entry:⁶

(11) For every context c , “that F ” refers to an object α in c iff $\alpha = \delta_c(F)$.

Informally, what this means is that the instructions that a demonstrative of the form “that F ” comes equipped with are not “check the context, see which object counts as the *demonstratum*, make sure that object satisfies P in the world of the context and then choose it as the referent”, but

⁵ More generally, salience of any sort is something that should play no role in the lexical entry of a demonstrative [Michaelson & Nowak, 2022].

⁶ Notice that, in order to keep the discussion semi-formal, I chose to employ the same variables in the object language and in the metalanguage. More formally, the lexical entry should like like this: $\llbracket \text{that } F \rrbracket = \lambda c. \lambda w. \delta_c(\llbracket F \rrbracket)$.



rather “check the context, see which objects satisfy P in the world of the context and then select one of them”.⁷ Thus, an occurrence of “that man” in *c* would instruct the hearer to check which objects satisfy “being a man” in *c* and to select, for example, Boris Johnson, Arnold Schwarzenegger or Xí Jìnpíng. This is of course very different from checking whether $d_c = \text{Johnson}$, making sure that Johnson satisfies “being a man” in *c* and selecting him as the referent.

Needless to say, such selection is mediated by a plethora of pragmatic issues that the lexical entry is silent about. And, arguably this is as it should be: the function δ should be seen as a representation of the reference-fixing procedures that the participants of the conversation rely on in a certain context, but *notice that the function itself is part of the architecture of contexts, not of the meaning of “that”*. All that complex demonstratives instruct the hearer to do is to rely on δ , but their meaning is silent about what this function should look like, for this is an issue which is to be entirely determined by the context.⁸ We still lack a serious account of what the reference-fixing procedures that δ purports to represent may amount to, just as – for the record – we do not have any account of the mechanisms whereby an object comes to count as the agent, the addressee, the location or the *demonstratum* of a context. And, of course, such account falls far beyond the scope of this essay. What matters now are two things. On the one hand, (11) entails that *all the semantic job is performed by the nominal*. This is equivalent to entirely disposing of (10i) and relying only on an enriched version of (10ii). And, on the other, we are now entirely equipped for dealing with non-deictic uses.

⁷ An anonymous referee points out that this semantics is incompatible with the *uniqueness* clause traditionally associated with the definite article “the”, according to which “the king of France” can only be used felicitously iff there is a unique king of France. (11) does away with this uniqueness clause, for it allows demonstratives of the form “that F” to be employed even when there is more than one F around.

Arguably, this is as it should be. Sentences like “that mountain is taller than that mountain” bear no contradiction, as opposed their counterparts employing definite descriptions (“the mountain is taller than the mountain”) [cf. Georgi, 2015; Georgi, 2020]. That is precisely one of the key differences between definite descriptions and complex demonstratives: the latter carry no uniqueness clause whatsoever.

⁸ This means that gestures, perceptual focus or intentions lack *semantic significance*, but it does not entail that they are irrelevant. On the contrary, they are of the utmost importance when it comes to *pragmatically determining which context we are in*.

Consider a sentence like (4a). In the context devised above, it seems clear that δ need not range over the set of *all* women who wear a coat in the world w_c of the context, but rather over a restricted set of them, namely those relevant to the present situation – presumably, the empty set, which is why the demonstrative ends up failing to pick out anybody. Arguably, this is what gestures, intentions and perceptual focus achieve: they modify the context. And this is, too, the reason why δ is far less restricted, if restricted at all, in cases like (2) or (3), in which the mechanisms of deixis do not take place.



Let us go first for (2). In this sentence, the nominal “cleric who crowned her” contains a variable bound by the external quantifier “every queen”, and this means that it fails to determine a unique property: semi-formally, it will determine, for each queen x , the property of *being a y such that y is a cleric and y crowned x* . Consequently, δ will select different individuals for each queen: $\delta(\textit{being a } y \textit{ such that } y \textit{ is a cleric and } y \textit{ crowned Queen Victoria})$ and $\delta(\textit{being a } y \textit{ such that } y \textit{ is a cleric and } y \textit{ crowned Catherine the Great})$ obviously do not yield the same value – at least not in the actual world. As a result, the whole sentence will be true in a context c iff every queen in c cherishes a certain individual, one that is required to be a cleric who has crowned that very queen.⁹ And, of course, none of these individuals is required to be pointed at, ostended, intended or perceptually focused on in any way.

The solution to our problem with (3) is less technical. Recall that, in the context devised for this sentence, Greg has no acquaintance or direct perception of whatever individual satisfies the property, i.e., his utterance does not abide by (10i). Since we have disposed of this clause, the solution is *prima facie* straightforward: whoever the individual satisfying “scoring one hundred on the exam” may be, it will automatically be selected by the δ function. If Mary is the one who accomplished such achievement in the world w_c of the context c , then $\delta_c(\textit{“scoring one hundred on the exam”}) = \textit{Mary}$, and the whole sentence will be true in this context iff Mary is a genius. Of course, there is no need for her to satisfy any clause to the effect that she is being demonstrated by Greg in that context. Rather, what ensures that she will be picked out by the demonstrative is the assumption that Greg is abiding by in the context, namely that *there is a unique student who scored one hundred*, as he has been informed. This is what enables him to use (3) for conveying such thought: since he has learned that there is just one person who accomplished that achievement, he can (tacitly) assume that the δ function will select that particular individual as the value for the relevant property.

This shows that theories of uninterpretability can be adapted so as to deal with non-deictic uses: all they need to do is to dispose of the clause in (10i). Ultimately, what this solution amounts to is to treating uninterpretability as a thesis *merely about the nominal*. (10) brings at the same level both the nominal and the idea that something must be demonstrated in the context, but non-deictic uses suggest that the latter requirement is unfounded.

⁹ The details are far more complex than this semi-formal rendering of the theory suggests. Check Gimeno-Simó [2021a, p. §3.2].



5. Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that the right way to deal with cases in which the nominal of a complex demonstrative fails to correctly describe an object is uninterpretability. The reason is that such kind of mistakes are typically corrected in a metalinguistic manner, which suggests that the problem is not that an untrue content was asserted; in fact, such corrections can take place even when the allegedly transmitted proposition should count as true.

However, the traditional formulation in which uninterpretability has been stated brings on a par two distinct requirements: that the referent of the term should satisfy the nominal, and that it must somehow be demonstrated in the context of utterance. For this reason, *non-deictic* uses of complex demonstratives, in which there is no object around to be perceived or to be acquainted with, end up posing a problem for this kind of theories. I have argued that the solution is, simply, to dispose of such requirement.

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