

AMBIGUOUS ARTICLES  
AN ESSAY ON THE THEORY OF DESCRIPTIONS

by

FRANCESCO PUPA

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Philosophy in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,  
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Abstract

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Adviser: Professor Michael Devitt

What, from a semantic perspective, is the difference between singular indefinite and definite descriptions? Just over a century ago, Bertrand Russell provided a standard philosophical response. Descriptions are quantifier phrases, not referring expressions. As such, they differ with respect to the quantities they denote. Indefinite descriptions denote existential quantities; definite descriptions denote uniquely existential quantities. Now, while most philosophers were busying themselves defending and expanding upon Russell's position, some linguists were, quietly and independently, developing a radically different response. Descriptions, some linguists held, were referring expressions, not quantifier phrases. Accordingly, descriptions differ with respect to their rules of reference. Indefinite descriptions refer to 'novel' items, definite descriptions to 'familiar' ones.

Although some philosophers, most prominently Peter Strawson, would independently propose their own familiarity theories and although many linguists of a model-theoretic bent would join lock-step with the Russellians, little attempt was made to bridge the gap between these two seemingly incompatible responses. This dissertation composes the first systematic effort to bridge that gap. It provides a satisfactory answer to the above question which links the seemingly intractable divide between Russellians and familiarity

theorists. This is achieved by utilizing two key observations: Donnellan's observation and Devitt's observation.

Keith Donnellan observed that speakers use descriptions not only as devices of quantification but also as devices of reference. Michael Devitt, following Donnellan, observed that these two uses, being regular, systematic, and cross-linguistic, have the status of convention in our language. Taken in conjunction, these two observations, I argue, require postulating that descriptions are semantically ambiguous. These observations compel the thoughtful theorist to maintain that descriptions have two distinct semantic functions, one quantificational and one referential.

Working within the confines of this ambiguity thesis, I argue that, in a certain sense, all parties to the dispute were right and wrong. On the one hand, Russellians provided a correct semantic account of quantificational descriptions. On the other hand, familiarity theorists presented a general framework that provides a correct account of referential descriptions. Accordingly, the semantic contrast between singular indefinite and definite descriptions is two-fold. Descriptions can contrast either quantificationally or with respect to the speaker's view of the audience's familiarity with the description's referent. Thus, by conjoining the previous responses' successes and disposing of their failures, I propose a theory that both successfully accounts for the semantic contrast of indefinite and definite descriptions and integrates two seemingly irreconcilable approaches.

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## Chapter 1

### The Cast: Descriptions, Scales, Sets, and Chains

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#### 1.0 Introduction

The goal of this dissertation is to provide a satisfactory account of the semantics of indefinite and definite descriptions in English and thereby account for the semantic contrast between these English expressions. As such, the goal makes two crucial presuppositions. First, it presupposes that English contains singular indefinite and definite descriptions. Second, it presupposes that singular indefinite and definite descriptions are semantically contrastive. Without grounding these crucial presuppositions, the dissertation could not successfully commence, let alone successfully conclude. Accordingly, the main aim of this chapter is to provide a foundation for the presuppositions in question. There is, however, also a minor, more humble, aim. This aim is to familiarize the reader with the major cast members of the dissertation; the aim is to introduce the main concepts that will play a leading role throughout the dissertation.

The chapter proceeds as follows. In 1.1, we introduce syntactic definitions of indefinite and definite descriptions in English. After introducing these definitions, we demonstrate that English does indeed contain singular indefinite and definite descriptions. Next, in 1.2, we introduce ‘semantic contrast sets’. With this notion in place, we provide some *prima facie* reasons for assimilating the articles to such sets. Accordingly, we fulfill our main task. Finally, in 1.3, we argue that the articles are also, in a certain sense, complementary. Specifically, we argue that speakers regularly, conventionally, and systematically use singular indefinite and definite descriptions to construct ‘anaphoric chains’. With the introduction of anaphoric chains, we complete our

minor aim; we introduce our cast: descriptions, Horn scales, semantic contrast sets, and anaphoric chains.

### 1.1 What are Descriptions?

Following Abney (1987), we will hold that English contains determiner phrases (**DPs**, hereafter). **DPs** are phrases whose head node is occupied by a determiner.<sup>1</sup> Determiners are a loose grouping of words that can functionally modify noun phrases (**NPs**, hereafter). It should be no surprise, then, that a determiner can usually select an **NP** as its complement in a **DP**. Since the demonstratives ‘this’ and ‘that’ can functionally modify noun phrase, they belong to this loose grouping. Subsequently, ‘this’ and ‘this man’, as well as ‘that’ and ‘that man’, are **DPs**. A determiner, as one can observe, occupies the head position of each of these phrases.

Now, in English, the articles ‘a/n’ and ‘the’ are determiners. ‘A/n’ and ‘the’ functionally modify **NPs**. So phrases headed by either article are **DPs**. Accordingly, we define ‘indefinite descriptions’ and ‘definite descriptions’ in English like so:

(**D**<sub>1</sub>) *Indefinite Descriptions*. Those **DPs** that ‘a/n’ heads.<sup>2</sup>

(**D**<sub>2</sub>) *Definite Descriptions*. Those **DPs** that ‘the’ heads.

Furthermore, we shall restrict ‘descriptions’ only to those linguistic items that fall under **D**<sub>1</sub> or **D**<sub>2</sub>. In virtue of **D**<sub>1</sub> and **D**<sub>2</sub>, we can classify (1) as a singular indefinite description, (2) as a singular definite description, and (3) – (4) as neither an indefinite nor definite description:

1. A philosopher.

---

<sup>1</sup> For present purposes, the head node of a syntactic construction is the node of the construction which shares the same syntactic category of the syntactic construction it belongs to and contains no ‘bars’, i.e., the head node of  $X^n$  is  $X^0$ . See Cowper (1992) for an overview.

<sup>2</sup> Hereafter, we will use ‘a’ instead of ‘a/n’.

2. The philosopher.
3. Every Philosopher.
4. Saul Kripke.

So, then, if the head position of a phrase is occupied by 'a' or 'the', then the phrase is a description. If, on the other hand, the head position is not occupied by either 'a' or 'the', the phrase is not a description.

**D**<sub>1</sub> and **D**<sub>2</sub> are syntactic definitions of indefinite and definite descriptions. As such, both definitions are blind to the content of any given phrase. The definitions only take into account the word occupying the head position of a phrase. And even here there is no appeal to content. At this stage, we have definitions of indefinite and definite descriptions and yet we are wholly ignorant of the semantics of 'a' and 'the'. Furthermore, even if we found phrases that were headed by words that were phonologically distinct from but had the same semantic content as 'a' or 'the', the phrases would not, on our account, be descriptions.

This might appear to be a failing of **D**<sub>1</sub> and **D**<sub>2</sub>. The blindness to content at this preliminary stage, however, is legitimate. In fact it is demanded of us. Our task is to provide an analysis of the semantic contrast between indefinite and definite descriptions. This task, if it is not to be question begging, presupposes a content-neutral distinction between indefinite and definite descriptions. Our syntactic definitions provide us with the required content-neutral distinction.

While accepting the legitimacy of providing syntactic definitions of descriptions, one might feel somewhat uneasy with the particular formulations of **D**<sub>1</sub> and **D**<sub>2</sub>. The following **DPs** highlight the uneasiness:

5. Some linguist(s).
6. Several linguists
7. My linguist.
8. John's linguist.

If we adopt  $\mathbf{D}_1$  and  $\mathbf{D}_2$ , (5) – (8) are not descriptions; none satisfy either  $\mathbf{D}_1$  or  $\mathbf{D}_2$ .

Throughout the literature, however, (5) – (6) are traditionally labeled 'indefinite', while (7) – (8) are traditionally labeled 'definite'.<sup>3</sup>  $\mathbf{D}_1$  and  $\mathbf{D}_2$ , then, fail to conform to tradition. Of course, this doesn't mean that  $\mathbf{D}_1$  or  $\mathbf{D}_2$  are faulty; after all, tradition isn't an infallible guide. And here, as elsewhere, it might lead us astray. We are left, it appears, with two options. The first is to conform to tradition, the second to reject it.

To come into conformity with tradition,  $\mathbf{D}_1$  and  $\mathbf{D}_2$  must be sufficiently complicated to capture the traditional assessments of (5) – (8). The complications, however, might turn out to be too complicated to be practical. English will always turn up novel phrases that traditional assessment will have the impulse to label as 'indefinite' or 'definite' descriptions. Accordingly, the definitions capturing such assessments will be nothing more than an open-ended list of phrases; this list is surely of little use when one is beginning to do explanatory work. It is best, we hold, to part ways with traditional assessment, at least at this stage.

Holding onto  $\mathbf{D}_1$  and  $\mathbf{D}_2$  has its obvious benefits; they provide useful and simple definitions for initiating explanatory work. The drawback, of course, is the conflict with

---

<sup>3</sup> As Jespersen puts it:

It is very important from the outset to insist on the fact that the articles are not the only means of making a word [i.e. nominal] definite or indefinite. 'My hat', 'John's hat', 'this hat' are just as definite as 'the hat'; and 'some hat', 'one hat', 'any hat' just as indefinite as 'a hat'. This has often been overlooked by grammarians. (1949: 404 – 405).

Russell (1905) takes phrases such as (8) to be semantically similar to definite descriptions. Russell, however, does not explicitly label such possessive  $\mathbf{DP}$ s as 'definite descriptions'.

traditional assessment on particular cases. But perhaps this conflict is simply illusory. Adopting a syntactical notion of descriptions, we hold that (5) – (8) are not descriptions. However, this doesn't necessary mean we couldn't view some phrases as semantically equivalent to indefinite or definite descriptions. Perhaps when viewed through semantic lenses, (5) – (8) appear to belong to the same set as those expressions satisfying  $\mathbf{D}_1$  or  $\mathbf{D}_2$ . So, from a semantical point of view, (5) – (8) might be lumped in with descriptions. However, from a non-semantic perspective, (5) – (8) are not descriptions, since they fail to satisfy  $\mathbf{D}_1$  or  $\mathbf{D}_2$ . As content-neutral definitions are demanded at this stage in order to avoid question-begging definitions, the definitions must be blind to content.  $\mathbf{D}_1$  and  $\mathbf{D}_2$  fulfill this requirement. As such they will be adopted. So, at this point, we break with tradition; perhaps later, when we provide a semantical account of the articles, our semantical assessments will coalesce with what tradition dictates. Nothing explanatorily detrimental, we believe, will result from breaking with tradition at this point. The only effects are positive.

Now that we have defined 'indefinite descriptions' and 'definite descriptions', we can move to give some *prima facie* reasons for maintaining that 'a' and 'the' compose a semantic contrast set. Afterwards, we shall look at the complementary nature of certain uses of indefinite and definite descriptions.

## 1.2 Horn Scales and Semantic Contrast Sets

### 1.2.1 Horn Scales

A Horn scale is an ordered tuple of sorts.<sup>4</sup> The ordered tuple consists of at least two items that are composed in accordance with three restrictions. The first restriction we

---

<sup>4</sup> Horn (1972) first introduced these scales; hence the name. See Gazdar (1979) and Levinson (1984, 2000) for expansions and refinements.

might label the ‘lexical restriction’. The lexical restriction requires that the members of the tuples are expressions. So  $\langle \text{‘John’}, 1 \rangle$  fails to pass the lexical restriction;  $\langle \text{‘John’}, \text{‘Mary’} \rangle$ , however, conforms to it.

The second restriction deals with ‘aboutness relations’. In short, the ‘aboutness restriction’ dictates that members of a scale must share the same aboutness relations. This restriction, of course, requires that we have some notion of ‘aboutness’ on hand. Here, interpretational semantics provides the requisite notion.<sup>5</sup>

Within interpretational semantics, one explicates ‘aboutness’ in terms of semantic categories. Expressions, we are told, share the same aboutness relation whenever they belong to the same semantic category. A semantic category, in turn, is a category whose members are appropriately assigned the same ‘entity’ when the language housing the expressions receives an arbitrary interpretation. The entities in question could be individuals, truth-values, functions, and so on. So, for example, when English receives an arbitrary interpretation, if each expression is given its appropriate assignment, ‘and’ and ‘or’ will be assigned the same ‘entity’, namely a binary function from two truth-values to a truth-value. Accordingly, ‘and’ and ‘or’ belong to the same semantic category. They belong to the category of binary truth functions. An intransitive verb, like, say, ‘runs’ gets assigned a function from individuals to truth-values. Thus, ‘runs’ does not belong to the same semantic category as ‘and’ and ‘or’. Now, ‘runs’ might belong to the same semantic category as ‘swims’, since this, too, gets assigned a function from individuals to truth-values.

---

<sup>5</sup> For details and a brief history, see Evans (1973b, 1982).

Now, of course, it might seem that, in numerous cases, the division of expressions into semantic categories will depend upon some arbitrary construction of semantic categories. For instance, one might decide to arbitrarily assign ‘believes’ and ‘knows’ to distinct semantic categories on the grounds that the latter, unlike the former, is a member of the **factive attitudinatives**. In the extreme, one might say that no two expressions belong to the same semantic category since there will always be subtle differences between two non-synonymous expressions. In order to avoid this result, Evans tells us that we ought to:

Construct a new category out of an older and more comprehensive category only when we can make an assignment to members of the new category which provides a **different** explanation for the behavior which members of the new category had in common with the old, the provision of which explanation would show that the apparent unity in the behavior of members of the old category was deceptive, concealing deep differences of functioning. (1973b: 245). (His emphasis).

Only in this manner, it seems, shall we avoid capricious sorting.

So, within interpretational semantics, the aboutness restriction amounts to the following. The members of the tuple satisfy the aboutness restriction just in case they belong to the same semantic category. The members satisfy the aboutness restriction whenever the members appropriately receive the same assignment upon some arbitrary interpretation of the language in question. So, for instance, <‘and’, ‘or’> satisfies the aboutness restriction; <‘and’, ‘runs’> does not.

Finally, the members of the scale must be in the appropriate entailment relations with each other. As such, we will call this restriction the ‘entailment restriction’. A proper explication of this restriction requires an appeal to ‘open sentences’. Now, an open sentence is a gappy sentence; it contains empty slots, which, when appropriately filled,

produce a complete grammatical sentence. Let's use the schematic letter  $\ulcorner x \urcorner$  to represent the empty slots. Accordingly, (1) is an open sentence:

1.  $\ulcorner x \text{ is a philosopher} \urcorner$ .

By substituting an appropriate expression for  $\ulcorner x \urcorner$ , we can produce a complete grammatical sentence. For example, if we replace  $\ulcorner x \urcorner$  by 'Sally', we produce the complete grammatical sentence 'Sally is a philosopher'.

Now, take the open sentence:

2.  $\ulcorner \text{Every student is a philosopher } x \text{ every student is a linguist} \urcorner$ .

When one replaces  $\ulcorner x \urcorner$  with 'or' or 'and', he converts (2) into a complete grammatical sentence. The latter substitution produces a sentence that, when uttered, expresses a proposition that semantically entails the proposition expressed by an utterance of the sentence produced by the former substitution. If every student is both a philosopher and a linguist, then surely every student is a philosopher or a linguist. The converse, of course, need not hold. Every student might be either a philosopher or a linguist without any student being both a philosopher and a linguist. Here, we have a unilateral entailment from 'and' to 'or'. And this, loosely speaking, is the entailment restriction.

More formally, let  $\ulcorner P \urcorner$  stand for an open sentence and  $\ulcorner P(\alpha) \urcorner$  stand for the sentence produced by replacing all occurrences of  $\ulcorner x \urcorner$  in  $\ulcorner P \urcorner$  with  $\ulcorner \alpha \urcorner$ . The entailment restriction dictates that if a member of the tuple,  $\ulcorner \alpha \urcorner$ , is to the left of another member,  $\ulcorner \beta \urcorner$ , then:

- i. Whenever an utterance of  $P(\alpha)$  expresses a true proposition, an utterance of  $P(\beta)$  also expresses a true proposition, but
- ii. There is at least one case where an utterance of  $P(\beta)$  expresses a true proposition and an utterance of  $P(\alpha)$  expresses a false one.

So,  $\ulcorner \langle \alpha, \beta \rangle \urcorner$  passes the entailment restriction just in case  $\ulcorner P(\alpha) \urcorner$  semantically entails  $\ulcorner P(\beta) \urcorner$  but  $\ulcorner P(\beta) \urcorner$  doesn't semantically entail  $\ulcorner P(\alpha) \urcorner$ , for some open sentence  $\ulcorner P \urcorner$ . In

this respect, if  $\lceil \alpha \rceil$  is to the left of  $\lceil \beta \rceil$ , then  $\lceil \alpha \rceil$  is **stronger** than  $\lceil \beta \rceil$ ; if  $\lceil \alpha \rceil$  is to the right of  $\lceil \beta \rceil$ , then  $\lceil \alpha \rceil$  is **weaker** than  $\lceil \beta \rceil$ . In the ordered tuple  $\langle \text{'and'}, \text{'or'} \rangle$ , 'and' is stronger than 'or'.

Built into the entailment restriction is a non-synonymy restriction. Suppose  $\lceil \alpha \rceil$  and  $\lceil \beta \rceil$  are synonymous. In that case, utterances of  $\lceil P(\alpha) \rceil$  and  $\lceil P(\beta) \rceil$  will always express the same propositions. Obviously, then, the propositions will always have identical truth-values. As such, any ordered tuple of synonymous expressions will fail to satisfy the entailment restriction. The tuple will not satisfy (ii) above. Thus, Horn scales must be composed of non-synonymous words. This is the non-synonymy restriction.

Combing the lexical, aboutness, and entailment restrictions, we arrive at Horn scales:

**(D<sub>3</sub>) Horn Scale.** An ordered tuple  $\langle \alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_n, \beta \rangle$  is a Horn scale *iff*  $\langle \alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_n, \beta \rangle$  satisfies the lexical restriction, aboutness restriction, and entailment restriction.<sup>6</sup>

Now, while (3) and (4) are Horn scales, (5) and (6) are not:

3.  $\langle \text{'and'}, \text{'or'} \rangle$ .
4.  $\langle \text{'necessarily'}, \text{'possibly'} \rangle$ .
5.  $\langle \text{'realize'}, \text{'desire'} \rangle$ .
6.  $\langle \text{'succeed'}, \text{'try'} \rangle$ .

Obviously, (3) and (4) conform to **D<sub>3</sub>**. The members of (3) and (4) are expressions which belong to the same semantic categories. Furthermore, the members of (3) and (4) instantiate the right entailment patterns; they satisfy the entailment restriction. (5) and

---

<sup>6</sup> Traditionally, a Horn scale must meet a fourth restriction, namely the 'equality' restriction. The equality restriction requires that the members of the scale be equally lexicalized; it requires that they be composed of the same number of morphemes. The equality restriction, we are told, is needed in order to circumvent problems that would otherwise arise from a flouting of Grice's (1989) manner maxim. Since, we cannot, at this stage, introduce Grice's conversational principles, we cannot incorporate the equality restriction. For our purposes, however, this omission is inconsequential. In 3.3.1, fn. 22, we present a Gricean formulation of Horn scales.

(6), however, fall short of  $\mathbf{D}_3$ . In particular, (5) does not satisfy the aboutness restriction. Loosely speaking, ‘realize’ denotes a function from an individual, a proposition, and his epistemic stance towards that proposition to a truth-value, while ‘desire’ denotes a function from an individual, a proposition (or individual), and his emotional stance towards that proposition (or individual) to a truth-value. Now, (6) meets the lexical and aboutness restriction. Nonetheless, it fails to satisfy the entailment restriction. Consider (7) and (8):

7. Someone succeeded to pass Phys. Ed.

8. Someone tried to pass Phys. Ed.

Obviously, an utterance of (7) can express a true proposition in some circumstance in which an utterance of (8) expresses a false proposition. John could succeed in passing Phys. Ed without trying to do so. In fact, John could succeed to pass Phys. Ed while intentionally trying to **fail** it. Thus, (6), like (5), is not a Horn scale.

### *1.2.2 Semantic Contrast Sets*

Still, (6) has much in common with (3) and (4). First, (6), like (3) and (4), satisfies the aboutness restriction; its members belong to the same semantic category. Second, each pair contains members that are not synonymous with each other. That is, (3), (4), and (6) satisfy the non-synonymy restriction. Each pair, then, contains expressions from the same semantic category that differ with respect to their meanings. With (3) and (4), the different meanings spark a special entailment relation; with (6), the diverging meanings cause no such spark.

And, here, we stumble upon semantic contrast sets. To say that  $\lceil\alpha\rceil$  and  $\lceil\beta\rceil$  are semantically contrastive is on par with maintaining that  $\lceil\alpha\rceil$  and  $\lceil\beta\rceil$  share the same

aboutness relationships but are non-synonymous. Naturally, then, we define a semantic contrast set as follows:

**(D<sub>4</sub>) Semantic Contrast Set.** A set  $\Gamma$  is a semantic contrast set *iff*  $|\Gamma| \geq 2$  and  $\Gamma$ 's members satisfy the lexical restriction, aboutness restriction, and non-synonymy restriction.

As such, (9) – (11) constitute semantic contrast sets:

9. {‘and’, ‘or’}.
10. {‘necessarily’, ‘possibly’}.
11. {‘succeed’, ‘try’}.

As we saw above, these sets satisfy the lexical, aboutness, and non-synonymy restriction. Once again, ‘desire’ and ‘realize’ are the odd men out. The set these expressions compose fails to satisfy the aboutness restriction; it fails to conform to the dictates of **D<sub>4</sub>**.

Semantic contrast sets and Horn scales share similar properties. Each of their respective members must meet the lexical, aboutness, and non-synonymy restrictions. Subsequently, any Horn scale can be transformed into a semantic contrast set. The set composed of ‘and’ and ‘or’, for example, conforms to the requirements of **D<sub>4</sub>**. There are, however, cases where the members of a semantic contrast set cannot be transformed into a Horn scale. As we have seen, this is the case with ‘succeed’ and ‘try’. Neither <‘succeed’, ‘try’>, nor <‘try’, ‘succeed’> pass the entailment restriction. Semantic contrast sets are, in this respect, a weakened modification of Horn scales.

### 1.2.3 Do the Articles Constitute a Semantic Contrast Set?

Adopting **D<sub>4</sub>**, let’s consider the articles’ status. Let ‘**A**’ stand for {‘a’, ‘the’}. Accordingly, **A** passes the lexical restriction. So, **A** is a semantic contrast set just in case ‘a’ and ‘the’ share the same aboutness relationships and are non-synonymous.

But do they possess these semantic properties? We must admit that, at this stage, any answer to this question will be tentative. The reason for the tentativeness is quite simple. In order to know whether the articles are non-synonymous members of the same semantic category, one must provide a semantic account of ‘a’ and ‘the’. At this stage, however, we are not prepared to initiate such a large task. Accordingly, we cannot decisively determine whether the articles compose a semantic contrast set. We can, however, provide some *prima facie* reasons for believing that the articles do form such a set. We now turn to this admittedly modest task.

‘Focused’ descriptions, it seems, provide us with some reason to suspect that ‘a’ and ‘the’ are non-synonymous members of the same semantic category. Take (12) and (13):

12. Islamic law is a basic source of legislation in Iraq; but it is not the basic source of legislation.

13. Islamic law is the basic source of legislation in Iraq; it is not (just) a basic source of legislation.

If ‘a’ and ‘the’ were synonymous, then the second clauses in (12) and (13) would be semantically redundant. This, however, is not the case. After hearing the second clause in (12), a secularist might feel a sense of cautious optimism<sup>7</sup>; after hearing the second clause in (13), the secularist will undoubtedly be overcome with despair. Either way, redundancy does not engender such sensations. It appears, then, that ‘a’ and ‘the’ are not synonymous. Here, we cautiously conclude that A passes the non-synonymy restriction.

These focused descriptions also seem to support the contention that the articles belong to the same semantic category. Consider (14) and (15):

14. It is possible that all bachelors are male, but it is not necessary that they be.

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<sup>7</sup> Notice, of course, that this interpretation is naturally helped along by stressing the definite article.

15. It is necessary that all bachelors are male; it is not (just) possible that they are. With (14) and (15), an attentive audience will not perceive any coarse intra-sentential topic change as the speaker moves from the first clause to the second. Rather, the audience will perceive that the speaker is either denying some stronger aspect of the semantic category, as in the former case, or emphasizing it, as in the latter case. The same, we believe, can be said of (12) and (13). It cannot, however, be said of (16) and (17):

16. John desires that Mary like him, but he doesn't realize that she does.

17. John realizes that Mary likes him, but he doesn't desire that she do so.

Here, we do have a change of topic. In the former case, the speaker moves from talk of John's emotional states to his epistemic states. In the latter case, the speaker moves in the opposite direction. This change in topic does not occur with (12) and (13). Now, a chief difference between 'possibly' and 'necessarily', on the one hand, and 'desire' and 'realize', on the other hand, is that the former are members of the same semantic category, while the latter are not. So, if 'a' and 'the' mirror 'possibly' and 'necessarily', as it seems they do, then one can cautiously contend that perhaps 'a' and 'the' are also members of the same semantic category. From here, it is no big leap to claim that **A** seems to pass the aboutness restriction.

The position that the articles are non-synonymous members of the same semantic category receives further support from semantic practice itself. Almost without exception<sup>8</sup>, theorists who seem to agree on little else nonetheless treat the articles in a

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<sup>8</sup> As we shall see in 4.3.1.1, Christophersen (1939) characterizes indefinite descriptions as quantificational and definite descriptions as referential. Interestingly, Kaplan (1972) would independently divide indefinite descriptions from definite descriptions in the same way. For a criticism of Kaplan's argument for treating the indefinite article as a device of quantification, see 2.2.2, fn. 28. More recently, Szabó (2000, 2003,

uniform manner; they treat them as distinct units of the same classes of expressions. For instance, while Russell (1905) classified the articles as distinct devices of quantification, Strawson (1950) classified them as different devices of reference. Later, Wilson (1978) proposed that the articles were really predicational in nature.<sup>9</sup> Not to be left out, Fodor and Sag (1982) maintained that the articles served diverse quantificational and referential roles, while Partee (1986) held that the articles actually instantiated distinct quantificational, referential, and predicational functions. Here, we have five diverse treatments of the articles from philosophers and linguists alike. Yet each proposal has a common thread; they all maintain that the articles are non-synonymous members of the same semantic category or categories. This fact, we believe, provides some rather decent antidotal evidence that **A** constitutes a semantic contrast set.

So, tentatively, at least, **A** seems to pass the aboutness and non-synonymy restrictions. Accordingly, we will cautiously label **A** as a semantic contrast set. So, although we don't have an account of the particular way(s) in which 'a' and 'the' are semantically contrastive, we, nonetheless, have some *prima facie* reasons to suppose that they are. For now, this will have to do. Later, in chapters 2 – 4, we will conclusively demonstrate that the articles do indeed form semantic contrast **sets**. But, before doing so, we stop to introduce our last cast member: anaphoric chains.

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2005) and Ludlow and Segal (2004) have claimed that 'a' and 'the' are synonymous. This, I take it, is just **a sloppy way** of saying that the articles make the same truth-conditional contribution to the proposition expressed. For these theorists, that contribution is existential quantification. For a critique of this view, see 3.3.6.3, fn. 67.

<sup>9</sup> For a recent revival of this view, see Graff (2001).

### 1.3 Anaphoric Chains: The Articles Complementary Relationship

Until now, we have only mentioned the contrastive relationship holding between ‘a’ and ‘the’. Their relationship, however, is not exclusively antagonistic. On many occasions the articles find themselves in a symbiotic relationship. Adopting Chastain’s (1975) terminology, we shall say that indefinite and definite descriptions are regularly, conventionally, and systematically used to form anaphoric chains. Let’s take a look.

#### 1.3.1 Anaphoric Chains

For our purposes, anaphoric chains are **n**-tuples of expressions that **S** (a speaker, hereafter) uses in a coordinated fashion. Here, ‘coordinated’ uses of expressions are those uses of expressions that are properly interpreted as co-indexed. The tuples consist of two segments: antecedents and anaphors. An antecedent constitutes the first object in the sequence; it initiates the anaphoric chain. Anaphors are those objects that ‘look back’ to the antecedent; their semantic value is very much dependent upon the semantic value of the antecedent.

Consider (1):

1. Every person who thinks that **David** is funny thinks **he** is nice.

In some instances, **S**’s utterance of (1) is properly interpreted as (2):

2. Every person who thinks that **David** is funny thinks **David** is nice.

Here, **S** coordinates his use of ‘David’ and ‘he’; **S**’s use of the expressions receives the same index. Accordingly, the sequence <‘David’, ‘he’> constitutes an anaphoric chain; ‘David’ serves as the antecedent; ‘he’ is an anaphor whose semantic value is dependent upon the semantic value of ‘David’.

Of course, in other circumstances, **S**'s utterance of (1) might be properly interpreted as (3):

3. Every person who thinks that **David** is funny thinks **John** is nice. (David  $\neq$  John).

In these circumstances, **S** does not coordinate his use of 'David' and 'he'. As such, 'David' and 'he' don't receive the same index. Naturally, <'David', 'he'> fail to constitute an anaphoric chain.

### *1.3.2 Descriptions as Anaphoric Chains*

Now, singular indefinite and definite descriptions are regularly, conventionally, and systematically used to form anaphoric chains. In the course of a conversation, a speaker will introduce an indefinite description and, later in the conversation, supplement it with, among other things, a definite description. An indefinite description, on many occasions, acts as an antecedent to a definite description. **S** can, in some circumstances, use indefinite and definite descriptions in a coordinated fashion. In this sense, 'a' and 'the' are in a relationship that is semantically complementary. This is rather unique. 'A' and 'the' appear to be not only semantically contrastive but complementary as well. To illustrate this, we turn to Sally and John.

Striking up a conversation, Sally tells John that:

4. Today, **a dog** was chasing **a woman** down our street. Fortunately, **the woman** was quicker than **the dog**; **the woman** escaped unharmed.

On its natural interpretation, Sally's utterance concerns one particular dog and one particular woman. Sally, it appears, coordinates her usage of 'a dog' and 'the dog' as well as 'a woman' and 'the woman'; the expressions receive the same index. In each case, the indefinite description acts as an antecedent; the definite description functions as an anaphor. Here, the semantic value of the definite description depends upon the

indefinite description's semantic value. Note that the descriptions' NPs don't necessarily need to be equivalent in order for Sally to coordinate her usage of them:

5. Today, **a dog** was chasing **a girl** down our street. Fortunately, **the frail child** was quicker than **the wild beast; the terrified soul** escaped unharmed.

In fact, in most cases, there is a preference, perhaps stylistic in nature, that the coordinated descriptions have diverging NPs.<sup>10</sup>

Interestingly, definite descriptions cannot act as antecedents to indefinite descriptions. The order of coordination, it seems, runs in one direction only. Take (6):

6. Today, **the dog** was at it again. **A dog** was chasing **the woman** down our street. Fortunately, **a woman** was quicker than any dog.

Supposing that it admits of a coherent interpretation, an utterance of (6) cannot be interpreted in such way that 'a dog' and 'the dog' or 'a woman' and 'the woman' are co-indexed. In (6), the indefinite descriptions' semantic value cannot depend upon the definite descriptions' semantic value. It seems, then, that while any tuple of the form  $\langle \ulcorner \text{the } F \urcorner, \ulcorner \text{an } F \urcorner \rangle$  fails to instantiate an anaphoric chain, tuples exemplifying  $\langle \ulcorner \text{an } F \urcorner, \ulcorner \text{the } F/G \urcorner \rangle$  can do so.

Now, definite descriptions, like their indefinite counterparts, can act as antecedents to, among other things, pronouns. Suppose Sally utters:

7. Today, **the dog** was at it again. **He** was chasing a woman down our street.

Although not necessary, it is natural to interpret Sally's use of the definite description and the pronoun as coordinated. Definite descriptions and pronouns can form anaphoric

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<sup>10</sup> Perhaps this isn't purely stylistic; perhaps it has something to do with adhering to the manner maxim. After all, as we shall shortly see, speakers can coordinate indefinite descriptions with third-person singular pronouns. So, perhaps, if Sally chooses a definite description over a pronoun, there must be some conversational purpose to do so. Otherwise, she would violate the manner maxim and Sally, our paradigm of cooperation, would never do that!

chains.<sup>11</sup> Definite descriptions, then, can serve as both antecedents and anaphors.

Indefinite descriptions, however, cannot serve as anaphors at all. Sally, for example, cannot coordinate these indefinite descriptions:

8. Today, **a dog** was chasing **a girl** down our street. **A dog** almost bit **a girl**. **A girl** escaped unharmed.

English, it appears, prohibits such coordination. Accordingly, the inability of definite descriptions to serve as antecedents to indefinite descriptions appears to be a consequence of the absolute inability of indefinite descriptions to serve as anaphors. In this respect, indefinite descriptions diverge from their definite counterparts. Now, any satisfactory semantical account of the articles should provide an adequate explanation of this divergence.

#### 1.4 Conclusions

Now, let's pause and retrace our steps. Initially, we provided syntactic definitions of indefinite and definite descriptions as they appear in English. These definitions provide a content-neutral way to distinguish indefinite and definite descriptions from each other and from all other constructions. Next, we formulated, by way of Horn scales, the idea of a semantic contrast set. We, then, presented some evidence suggesting that the articles participate in such sets. By doing so, we fulfilled our chief aim: we provided adequate grounding for the claim that English contains singular indefinite and definite descriptions and that the articles 'a' and 'the' are semantically contrastive; we provided a basis for investigating the indefinite/definite contrast as it appears in English. In order to fulfill our minor aim, we introduced 'anaphoric chains'. As we saw, singular indefinite and definite descriptions can enter into these chains. Thus, we discovered that not only are

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<sup>11</sup> Definite descriptions, of course, can serve as anaphors to numerous pronouns.

‘a’ and ‘the’ semantically contrastive, they are, in a certain sense, semantically complementary as well. This discovery, we think, requires that any adequate semantic account of the articles must explain their contrastive and complementary nature. One, then, can view the chief task of the dissertation as an attempt to provide such an account.

In the next chapter, we begin this task by looking at the most popular account of the indefinite/definite contrast, namely Russell’s.

## Chapter 2

### Russell's Account: General Terms and Uniqueness Entailments

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#### 2.0 Introduction

In chapter 1, we cautiously claimed ‘a’ and ‘the’ are semantically contrastive. In chapter 2, we turn our attention to the most popular account of the indefinite/definite contrast: Bertrand Russell’s. Russell treats the articles as quantifier determiners and descriptions as quantifier phrases. Descriptions, then, are general terms. Accordingly, the indefinite/definite contrast is, at bottom, a distinction between the quantificational relations the articles denote. For Russell, the **sole** divergence among indefinite and definite descriptions turns on uniqueness entailments. Our goal here is three-fold: to present Russell’s account of the indefinite/definite contrast, to provide some *prima facie* reasons for adopting it, and to gesture towards a problem it faces.

The chapter begins, in 2.1, with a sketch of the distinction between singular and general terms. After introducing this distinction, we explicate some of the most crucial differences between singular and general terms. Only with these pieces in place, can Russell’s account of the indefinite/definite contrast be properly discussed. In 2.2, we present Russell’s account as well as some reasons for adopting it. The consequences of Russell’s account are also explored. In 2.3, Russell’s account is modified to handle the ubiquitous problem of quantifier domain restriction. These modifications place us in a good position to provide a Russellian account of the complementary relationship holding between the articles. Accordingly, in 2.4, we turn to this task. By exploring the Russellian account of anaphoric chains, we shall locate a problem within Russell’s account of the indefinite/definite contrast.

## 2.1 The Singular/General Distinction

### 2.1.1 Singular and General Terms

Throughout his early works, Russell (1905, 1911, 1912, 1918, 1919, 1927) employed a distinction between what we might call ‘singular’ and ‘general’ terms.<sup>1</sup> Working within this distinction, Russell formulated his account of the indefinite/definite contrast.

Accordingly, an understanding of the distinction between singular and general terms is critical for understanding Russell’s account. Let’s begin by looking at this crucial distinction.

Consider the open sentence:

1. ‘ $x$  is mortal’.

This open sentence can be transformed into a complete grammatical sentence by replacing ‘ $x$ ’ with an appropriate **DP**. If we replace ‘ $x$ ’ with the **DP** ‘David Letterman’, we create the complete grammatical sentence ‘David Letterman is mortal’. A literal and assertive utterance<sup>2</sup> of this sentence-token expresses the proposition:

2. <David Letterman, Mortal>.

Since David Letterman is the referent of ‘David Letterman’ in English, the proposition expressed by the utterance is true *iff* David Letterman is mortal. As Russell would have put it, an utterance of the sentence-token expresses a proposition in which David

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<sup>1</sup> Aristotelians, of course, wouldn’t call ‘general terms’ what we shall call ‘general terms’. At the risk of generating confusion, I use the term in order to have a complement to singular terms and singular propositions. Instead of ‘singular terms’ and ‘general terms’, Russell (1905, 1911, 1918, 1919, 1927) spoke of ‘proper names’ and ‘incomplete symbols’ or ‘denoting phrases’. While the labels are distinct, the meanings are equivalent.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout, I will simply speak of utterances as opposed to literal and assertive uses of utterances. No confusion should result.

Letterman is a constituent.<sup>3</sup> The grammatical subject of the sentence contributes a constituent to the proposition expressed; it contributes a logical subject.

The situation is quite different when  $\lceil x \rceil$  is replaced by the **DP** ‘Every human’ to create the complete grammatical sentence ‘Every human is mortal’. An utterance of this sentence-token expresses a true proposition *iff*:

$$3. \{x: x \text{ is human}\} \cap \{x: x \text{ is mortal}\} = \{x: x \text{ is human}\}.$$

The truth conditions for the proposition expressed do not contain any individuals. The grammatical subject of the sentence, ‘Every human’, does not contribute a logical subject. Instead, the utterance expresses a proposition about a quantificational relationship between properties; the proposition’s truth-value is determined by the quantificational relationship holding between the two properties. It is in this respect that determiners like ‘every’ are deemed quantificational.

Given that tokens of the **NP** complement ‘human’ and the verb phrase (**VP**, hereafter) ‘is mortal’ contribute properties to the proposition expressed and given the truth conditions of our proposition, ‘every’ denotes a function from two properties to a truth-value. Specifically, if **F** stands for the set of individuals having the property **F** and **G** stands for the set of individuals having the property **G**, then ‘every’ denotes ( $\odot$ 1):

$$(\odot 1). \lceil f_{\langle F, G \rangle} \rceil \text{ is true } \textit{iff} \mathbf{F} \cap \mathbf{G} = \mathbf{F}.$$

Let’s call this function the ‘EVERY function’.

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<sup>3</sup> In *Principia Mathematica*, Russell and Whitehead tell us:

If we supply a context, as in ‘Socrates is mortal,’ these words express a fact which Socrates himself is a constituent: there is a certain object, namely Socrates, which does have the property of mortality, and this object is a constituent of the complex fact which we assert when we say ‘Socrates is mortal’. (1927: 54).

Russell (1905) makes similar remarks in a footnote aimed at Frege (1892), who rejected Russell’s position.

One could, of course, view ‘every’ as denoting a unary function. On this view, ‘every’ denotes a function that takes a property as an argument and provides a unary function as a value. This unary function, in turn, takes a property as an argument and provides a truth-value in return. **Quantifier phrases**, on this approach, are functions from properties to truth-values.

On the semantic side, one loses nothing by treating quantifier determiners as denoting unary, as opposed to binary, functions. On both approaches, the truth conditions for the propositions are equivalent. The sole difference between the two approaches is syntactic.<sup>4</sup> The unary approach holds that ‘every’ combines with a predicate to create a unary quantifier. It adopts the notation of restricted quantifier logic (**RQ**, hereafter). The binary approach holds that ‘every’ must combine with two predicates to create a well-formed formula. It adopts the notation of binary quantifier logic. The present concern of the dissertation is with **DPs**. As such, the notation of **RQ** provides the best syntactic fit. Semantically, however, we shall consider quantifier determiners as denoting binary functions that take two properties as arguments and return truth-values in return. In this way, we can have our cake and eat it too.

The tokens of **DPs** can make (at least) two distinct contributions to the proposition expressed by an utterance of a sentence-token. They can contribute individuals or they can contribute functions from properties to truth-values. Those **DPs** that, through their tokens, contribute individuals to propositions are singular terms. Those **DPs** that,

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<sup>4</sup> Evans (1977, 1982) held that treating quantifier determiners as binary functions was semantically superior to treating them as unary functions since only on the binary approach could one provide a proper analysis of donkey anaphora. Thus, according to Evans, “the binary approach is actually forced upon us”. (1982: 59). Neale (1990), in my opinion, definitively refutes this claim; donkey anaphora does not force the binary approach upon us.

through their tokens, contribute functions from properties to truth-values are general terms. General terms, unlike singular terms, denote families of sets of individuals that share the property its **NP** complement denotes.<sup>5</sup> For our purposes, it will also be helpful to take general terms as denoting those individuals that compose the sets which constitute the family of sets. When a singular term replaces 'x' in a simple open sentence, an utterance of the completed sentence-token expresses a singular proposition; when a general term replaces 'x', an utterance of the completed sentence-token expresses a general proposition.<sup>6</sup>

From our discussion, it is clear that ordinary proper names operate as singular terms.<sup>7,8</sup> Quantifier phrases, on the other hand, operate as general terms. Russell attempts to assimilate descriptions to quantifier phrases and thus to general terms. His best arguments in support of these efforts derive from exploiting the differences between singular and general terms. In numerous places, Russell argues that descriptions share the distinctive properties of general terms, while lacking the distinctive properties of singular terms. In order to properly understand this tactic, one must first become acquainted with the crucial differences between singular and general terms.

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<sup>5</sup> See Barwise and Cooper (1981).

<sup>6</sup> See Kaplan (1972, 1978a), and Donnellan (1974).

<sup>7</sup> In this business one has an awful time taking a step without setting off landmines. I take it that the category 'ordinary proper name' excludes the class of so-called 'descriptive proper names'. For example, names such as 'Neptune', 'Jack the Ripper', 'Deep Throat', and, most recently, 'Curveball' as well as philosophically motivated descriptive names such as Kaplan's (1968) 'Newman<sub>1</sub>', Devitt's (1981a) 'Oscar', and Evans's (1982) 'Julius' are excluded from the set of ordinary proper names.

<sup>8</sup> Russell (1911, 1912, 1919), of course, did not hold that ordinary proper names were singular terms. For Russell, ordinary proper names were, at bottom, general terms, namely definite descriptions. By 1917, the only expressions Russell took to be singular terms were the simple demonstratives 'this' and 'that'.

### 2.1.2 *The Distinctive Properties of Singular and General Terms*

Let's introduce 'designate' as a cover term for both reference and denotation. In this case, we can say that a **DP** is 'empty' if its tokens fail to designate any individuals. So, a singular term is empty whenever it fails to refer to any individual; a general term is empty whenever it denotes the empty set. As Russell (1927) noted, if 'x' is replaced with an empty singular term, no proposition will be expressed by an utterance of the completed sentence-token containing it. Suppose that the term 'Brop Broppity' is an empty proper name. Under this supposition, an utterance of (4) fails to express a proposition:

4. Brop Broppity is mortal.

However, if 'x' is replaced with an empty general term, an utterance of the completed sentence-token does express a proposition. In a unicorn-free universe, an utterance of (5) expresses a perfectly determinate proposition:

5. Every unicorn has four hoofs.

Given our formulation of the EVERY function, the proposition expressed is actually true.

Here, then, is a distinctive difference between singular and general terms. Empty general terms can be used to express propositions, whereas empty singular terms cannot. Thus, in order to determine whether a **DP** type is singular or general, one must first concoct an empty **DP** belonging to that type. Afterwards, one checks to see whether an utterance of a sentence-token containing the empty **DP** expresses a proposition. If so, then the **DP** is a general term; if not, then it is a singular term. Let's call this procedure for discovering whether a **DP** is a singular or general term the 'emptiness test'.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Evans (1982) labeled the underpinnings of this procedure 'Russell's criterion'. Russell spoke of his criterion in this manner:

The second distinctive difference between singular and general terms hinges on the knowledge required for understanding singular and general propositions.

According to Russell:

Every proposition which we can understand must be composed wholly of constituents with which we are acquainted. (1911: 173).

So, in order to understand a singular proposition, a person must, at the very least, be acquainted with the referent of a singular term as the referent of that term. Whereas, to understand a general proposition, a person need not be acquainted with any member of the set the general term currently denotes.<sup>10</sup>

Now, ‘acquaintance’ is a technical term. For Russell, a person is acquainted with an object just in case the person is directly aware of the object. Unfortunately, Russell believed that a person could only be directly aware of his own sense-data, universals, relations, and the contents of his own mind. One’s spouse, family, friends, co-workers, pets, neighbors, and personal possessions, of course, will not be found among such objects. Needless to say, Russell’s construal of acquaintance is somewhat extreme. We, however, are under no obligation to construe acquaintance in such an extreme manner. In fact, given its problems and detrimental implications, we are under some obligation to reject this construal.<sup>11</sup>

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Whenever the grammatical subject of a proposition can be supposed not to exist without rendering the proposition meaningless, it is plain that the grammatical subject is not a proper name, i.e. not a name directly representing some object. (1927: 54).

<sup>10</sup> Here’s Russell:

To understand a name you must be acquainted with the particular of which it is a name, and you must know that it is the name of that particular. ...To understand ‘red’, for instance, is to understand what is meant by saying that a thing is red. ...You do not have to know, concerning any particular ‘this’, that ‘This is red’ but you have to know what is the meaning of saying that anything is red. (1918: 205).

See Russell (1918: 202) as well.

<sup>11</sup> Sainsbury (1979) provides a nice summary of these problems and implications.

Luckily, Russell's notion of acquaintance can be separated from his epistemic and ontological commitments to sense-data. One can hold that a person is acquainted with an **object** just in case the person is causally linked to the **object**.<sup>12</sup> Thus, to understand a singular proposition, a person must, at the very least, be causally linked to the referent of a singular term as the referent of that term. Since general propositions do not contain individuals as constituents, a person need not have causal contact with any member of the set the general term currently denotes. The person only needs to be acquainted with the various relations and properties that compose the general proposition.

Thus, if a person is unacquainted with the designation of a term but can understand the proposition expressed by an utterance of a sentence-token containing that term, the term is general. If the person cannot understand the proposition, then the term is singular. 'David Letterman', then, is a singular term. A person unacquainted with David Letterman as the referent of 'David Letterman' would not be able to understand propositions that contain David Letterman as a constituent. 'Every unicorn' is a general term. This term denotes the empty set. Thus no one is acquainted with its denotation. Yet English speakers have no particular trouble understanding propositions expressed by sentence-tokens containing it. Utterances of sentence-tokens containing empty singular terms do not express propositions. Thus, there is no sense in which anyone could understand the proposition expressed by such utterances. Here is yet another procedure for arriving at the status of a **DP**. Let's call this procedure the 'understanding test'.

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<sup>12</sup> Generally speaking, many theorists maintain that acquaintance demands an extra recognitional requirement. For example, Evans (1973a, 1982), Sainsbury (1979), Davies (1981), and Neale (1990) hold that a person is acquainted with an object *iff* the person has had frequent perceptual/causal contact with the object and can recognize the object as the same object on numerous occasions. Devitt (1985), I believe, has decisively shown otherwise. As such, I have dropped the recognitional component in favor of Devitt's austere view.

The third distinctive difference rests on scopal considerations. Scope is a syntactic relation holding among expressions. Briefly, an expression  $\lceil\alpha\rceil$  takes wide scope with respect to an expression  $\lceil\beta\rceil$  whenever  $\lceil\alpha\rceil$  c-commands  $\lceil\beta\rceil$  at the appropriate syntactic level.<sup>13</sup> Now,  $\lceil\alpha\rceil$  c-commands  $\lceil\beta\rceil$  just in case every maximal projection dominating  $\lceil\alpha\rceil$  also dominates  $\lceil\beta\rceil$ , but  $\lceil\alpha\rceil$  doesn't dominate  $\lceil\beta\rceil$ .<sup>14</sup> So, for example,  $\lceil\alpha\rceil$  takes wide scope with respect to  $\lceil\beta\rceil$  in (6) but not in (7):

6.  $[_{XP} [_X \alpha] [_{YP} \beta]]$ .

7.  $[_{YP} [_{XP} [_{WP} \alpha]] [_Y [_{ZP} \beta]]]$ .

Scope, of course, is not a bivalent notion; it is possible for  $\alpha$  to take wider scope than  $\beta$  but narrower scope than  $\gamma$ . This, for instance, occurs in (8):

8.  $[_{ZP} [_Z \gamma] [_{XP} [_X \alpha] [_{YP} \beta]]]]$ .

Here,  $\gamma$  has the widest scope,  $\alpha$  takes intermediate scope, and  $\beta$  remains in the narrowest scope position.

Moving forward, consider (A) and (B):

(A):  $\lceil x \text{ is not mortal} \rceil$ .

(B):  $\lceil \text{it is not the case that } x \text{ is mortal} \rceil$ .

In (A), 'not' takes narrow scope with respect to the open sentence  $\lceil x \text{ is mortal} \rceil$ ; 'not' only scopes over the predicate 'is mortal'. In (B), however, 'not' takes wide scope with respect to the open sentence.

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<sup>13</sup> As May (1985) notes, the appropriate syntactic level is logical form (**LF**, hereafter). According to May, **LF**:

Represents... whatever properties of syntactic form are relevant to semantic interpretation; those aspects of semantic structure which are expressed syntactically. Succinctly, the contribution of grammar to meaning. (1985: 282).

For further discussion on scope and c-command, see Neale (1993a, 1993b).

<sup>14</sup> This particular formulation of 'c-command' is adopted from Cowper (1992).

Interestingly, whenever a singular term replaces  $\ulcorner x \urcorner$  in either (A) or (B) no difference in truth conditions ensues. Singular terms do not trigger what we might call ‘scopal ambiguity’. If singular terms did trigger scopal ambiguity, a difference in truth conditions would ensue between (A) and (B). But clearly, no such difference exists. When we replace  $\ulcorner x \urcorner$  by ‘David Letterman’ in (A) and (B), the two completed sentences are equivalent. The proposition expressed by an utterance of the completed sentence-tokens share the same truth-value in every conceivable situation.

General terms, however, do trigger scopal ambiguity with respect to (A) and (B). Suppose that we replace  $\ulcorner x \urcorner$  by ‘every man’ in (A) and (B). With this replacement, a divergence in truth conditions emerges. After the replacement, an utterance of (A) expresses a false proposition if at least one man is mortal whereas an utterance of (B) could, in these circumstances, express a true proposition just in case at least one man is also not mortal. Suppose that David Letterman is mortal but Conan O’Brien is not. In that case, the proposition expressed by an utterance of (A) is false, while the proposition expressed by an utterance of (B) is true. This is a plain case of divergent truth-values and thus a plain case of divergent truth conditions.

So, a **DP** is a general term *iff* the truth conditions of (A) and (B) differ when the **DP** replaces  $\ulcorner x \urcorner$  in (A) and (B). If the truth conditions do not differ, then the **DP** is a singular term. We will refer to this procedure as the ‘scope test’.

The final crucial difference between singular and general terms hinges upon some modal considerations. To grasp this last difference, some technical terminology must be introduced. Let’s suppose that a term  $\ulcorner t \urcorner$  of a language  $\ulcorner \mathbf{L} \urcorner$  designates an object  $\ulcorner o \urcorner$ . As Kripke (1971, 1972) explains,  $\ulcorner t \urcorner$  is a rigid designator in  $\ulcorner \mathbf{L} \urcorner$  *iff* in every counterfactual

situation in which  $\ulcorner o \urcorner$  exists,  $\ulcorner t \urcorner$  designates  $\ulcorner o \urcorner$  in  $\ulcorner \mathbf{L} \urcorner$  and  $\ulcorner t \urcorner$  never designates any other object in  $\ulcorner \mathbf{L} \urcorner$ .<sup>15</sup> If  $\ulcorner t \urcorner$  is not a rigid designator, we shall call it a ‘nonrigid designator’.

Consider the proposition expressed by an utterance of (9):

9. David Letterman works in show business.

The proposition contains David Letterman as a logical subject. With respect to the actual world, the proposition is true. In the actual world, David Letterman is a comedian. But suppose that David Letterman had become a math teacher instead. Relative to this counterfactual situation, the proposition would be false. Math teachers do not work in show business. As one can observe, to determine the truth-value of a singular proposition in any situation, real or stipulated, one must discover how matters stand with the logical subject in that situation. The logical subject, of course, is always the same individual. Thus, in English, singular terms are rigid designators; their tokens designate the same individual in every counterfactual situation where the individual exists and never any other individual. In English, ‘David Letterman’ is a rigid designator.

General terms, on the other hand, are often nonrigid designators.<sup>16</sup> Consider a counterfactual situation in which just three men, George, Brad, and Matt, live in New York. Suppose that George, Brad, and Matt are actors. In this counterfactual situation, an utterance of (10), expresses a true proposition:

10. Every man living in New York works in show business.

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<sup>15</sup> Later, in 5.1.4, we will introduce a revised notion of rigidity. This revised notion allows one to label context-sensitive elements, like ‘I’, as rigid expressions. Our current definition cannot allow for such labeling.

<sup>16</sup> There are some general terms whose designation does not alter in any counterfactual situation. General terms in mathematics provide a case: ‘Every even number’. Kripke (1971) remarks that ‘the positive square root of 25’ is a rigid designator since in every counterfactual situation it designates 5.

The EVERY relation holds among its arguments. Here, ‘Every man living in New York’ designates George, Brad, and Matt. The truth of the proposition, then, depends on how matters stand with them. Now, consider a counterfactual situation in which just two men, Michael and Robert, live in New York; George, Brad, and Matt decided to try their luck in Hollywood. Suppose that Michael and Robert are not in show business. Relative to this counterfactual situation, an utterance of (10) expresses a false proposition. In this world, ‘Every man living in New York’ designates Michael and Robert, not George, Brad, and Matt. ‘Every man living in New York’, then, can have distinct designations in distinct counterfactual situations. ‘Every man living in New York’ is a nonrigid designator.

The ‘modal test’, as we shall call it, works in the following manner. If a type of **DP** belongs to the class of singular terms, then all its members are rigid designators.<sup>17</sup> So, if one can construct cases where some member of a type of **DP** designates different individuals in different counterfactual situations, then that type of **DP** does not belong to the class of singular terms; it belongs to the class of general terms.

## 2.2 Russell’s Account of the Indefinite/Definite Contrast

According to Russell, a description does not, through its tokens, contribute an individual to a proposition. Descriptions are general terms.<sup>18</sup> Russell emphasized this point many times over. Here are two typical examples:

Our question is: What do I really assert when I assert ‘I met a man’? Let us assume, for the moment, that my assertion is true, and that in fact I met

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<sup>17</sup> See Sainsbury (2006). As we shall see at 5.1.4, fn. 17, Devitt (2004) disagrees with this assessment.

<sup>18</sup> As Neale explains:

If one does not see that on Russell’s account ‘the **F** is **G**’ expresses a general proposition, that ‘the **F**’ does not refer, one simply does not understand the theory. (1993a: 88).

Jones. It is clear that what I assert is **not** ‘I met Jones’. ... We may go further: not only Jones, but no actual man, enters into my statement. (1919: 167 – 8). (His emphasis).

It is of the utmost importance to realize that ‘the so-and-so’ does not occur in the analysis of propositions in whose verbal expression it occurs, that when I say ‘The author of *Waverly* is human’, ‘the author of *Waverly*’ is not the subject of that proposition, in the sort of way that Scott would be if I said ‘Scott is human’, using ‘Scott’ as a name. (1918: 251 – 52).

When someone replaces ‘ $x$ ’ by a description in a simple open sentence, one creates a complete grammatical sentence whose tokens speakers use to express general propositions. The articles are lumped together with quantifier determiners. As such, the articles are treated as denoting binary functions whose values depend upon the quantificational relationships holding between its arguments. The semantic contrast between ‘a’ and ‘the’, then, is, at bottom, a contrast between two distinct kinds of quantificational relationships. Accordingly, Russell’s account of the indefinite/definite contrast is a pure quantificational account. It is to this account that we now turn.

### *2.2.1 Russell’s Semantics and the Indefinite/Definite Contrast*

Russell’s semantical account of descriptions proceeds by investigating the truth conditions of the propositions expressed by utterances of sentence-tokens containing description-tokens. The basic idea is this. If one knows the truth conditions of a proposition, then one can determine what contribution a particular piece of language makes to the proposition. So, when one discovers the truth conditions of a proposition derived from a sentence containing a description, one can work backwards and discover the description’s contribution. And once one discovers that, one can work backwards to discover the article’s contribution.

Consider:

1. 'An F is G'.
2. 'The F is G'.

For simplicity's sake, suppose that 'F' and 'G' are monadic predicate variables, the values of which denote simple properties. And, once again, let **F** and **G** denote the sets of individuals that are F and G. For Russell, an utterance of a sentence-token exemplifying (1) expresses a true proposition *iff* the existential condition is met.

Existential Condition: At least one F is G.

In Russell's notation, the truth conditions are represented as:

3.  $(\exists x)(Fx \ \& \ Gx)$ .<sup>19</sup>

These truth conditions should seem familiar; they are the truth conditions for utterances of sentence-tokens exemplifying 'Some Fs are Gs'. Thus, on Russell's account 'a' and 'some' denote the same binary function.<sup>20</sup> This equivalence can strike one as hasty. After all, the syntax of 'a' and 'some' sharply diverge; 'a' cannot take plural or mass **NPs** as complements, while 'some' can. Furthermore, 'a' seems to suggest 'only one', whereas 'some' seems to suggest 'more than one'. While silent about the first divergence, Russell (1905, 1919) pins the second divergence upon 'psychological' or 'rhetorical' factors; they are not, for Russell, semantical in nature.

Now although Russell's truth conditions can strike one as hasty, they do admit of an intuitive justification. Suppose Russell had actually met two men: Jones and Smith. If 'a' meant 'only one', then Russell's assertion that he met a man would be false. In this

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<sup>19</sup> More accurately, this formula, like (4) below, is actually a cleaned up version of Russell's (1927) horrid notation.

<sup>20</sup> This claim makes sense of the traditional urge to label 'some F(s)' as an indefinite description. See 1.1 for details.

new context, however, his assertion remains true. Accordingly, the semantics of ‘a’ is not compatible with ‘only one’. It is, however, compatible with ‘at least one’; it conforms to Russell’s account.

The semantics of the definite article is somewhat more complex. An utterance of a sentence-token exemplifying ‘The F is G’ expresses a true proposition *iff* the existence, uniqueness, and universal conditions are met.

Existence Condition: There is at least one F.  
 Uniqueness Condition: There is at most one F.  
 Universal Condition: Every F is G.

In Russell’s notation, these truth conditions are represented as:

$$4. (\exists x)[(Fx \ \& \ (y)(Fy \rightarrow x = y)) \ \& \ Gx].$$

As one can plainly observe, these truth conditions do not contain any constants at all. These truth conditions, then, conform to Russell’s contention that descriptions are general terms. Now, by stipulation, F and G provide properties to the proposition. Thus, given the truth conditions of the proposition, the definite article must contribute a binary function.

These binary functions are easily formulated within set-theoretic notation. The indefinite article denotes (⊛2):

$$(\odot 2). \text{ ‘}f_{\langle F, G \rangle}\text{’ is true iff } |\mathbf{F} \cap \mathbf{G}| \geq 1.$$

Let’s call this function the ‘INDEF. function’. The definite article denotes the somewhat more complicated binary function (⊛3):

$$(\odot 3). \text{ ‘}f_{\langle F, G \rangle}\text{’ is true iff } |\mathbf{F}| = |\mathbf{F} \cap \mathbf{G}| = 1.$$

Let’s call this function the ‘DEF. function’.

In our preferred notation, **RQ**, ‘a’ and ‘the’ denote unary functions from properties to complex unary functions from properties to truth-values. Subsequently, descriptions denote unary functions from properties to truth-values. Once again, one loses nothing semantically from adopting the unary approach. In **RQ**, the truth clauses are:

(☼2').  $\lceil [\text{An } x: Fx] (Gx) \rceil$  is true *iff*  $|\mathbf{F} \cap \mathbf{G}| \geq 1$ .

(☼3').  $\lceil [\text{The } x: Fx] (Gx) \rceil$  is true *iff*  $|\mathbf{F}| = |\mathbf{F} \cap \mathbf{G}| = 1$ .

As one can observe, these truth clauses are semantically equivalent to their binary counterparts.

The indefinite/definite contrast, then, is a contrast between uniqueness entailments.

Here’s Russell:

The only thing that distinguishes ‘the so-and-so’ from ‘a so-and-so’ is the implication of uniqueness. (1919: 176).

When a speaker uses a definite description he asserts that there is **one and only one** satisfier of the property the **NP** complement denotes. When a speaker uses an indefinite description he asserts that there is **at least one** satisfier of the property the **NP** complement denotes. It is left open whether there is more than one satisfier of the property in question. The proposition expressed by an utterance of a sentence-token containing a definite description **entails** that the satisfier of the description is unique, while the proposition expressed by an utterance of a corresponding sentence-token containing an indefinite description does not. Furthermore, the proposition expressed by an utterance of a sentence-token containing a definite description entails that the description’s **NP** complement denotes a singleton set. Obviously, it might be the case that an indefinite description’s **NP** complement denotes a singleton set. Thus, the satisfier of the indefinite description would, in this case, be unique. However, it cannot

be inferred solely from the truth of the proposition expressed by an utterance of a sentence-token exemplifying  $\lceil \text{An } F \text{ is } G \rceil$  that the satisfier of the indefinite description is the sole member of  $\mathbf{F}$  or that  $\mathbf{F}$  is a singleton set.

Whenever the DEF. function provides the value ‘true’, the INDEF. function does as well. Unlike the INDEF. function, however, the DEF. function provides the value ‘false’ if there is more than one member of  $\mathbf{F}$ . Given that there are at least two inhabitants of London, the proposition expressed by an utterance of ‘an inhabitant of London drinks coffee’ is true, while, for Russell, the proposition expressed by an utterance of ‘the inhabitant of London drinks coffee’ is false.<sup>21</sup> This is the only feature that distinguishes the two functions; it exhausts the indefinite/definite contrast. This feature is expressed solely in quantificational terms. Accordingly, the indefinite/definite contrast is a purely quantificational contrast.<sup>22</sup>

As noted in 1.2.3, ‘a’ and ‘the’ seem semantically contrastive. That conclusion gained support in a roundabout way. Various examples and practices were cited. These seemed to signal that  $\mathbf{A}$  met the aboutness and synonymy restrictions; they seemed to demonstrate that  $\mathbf{A}$  is a semantic contrast set.<sup>23</sup> With Russell’s account, however, one

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<sup>21</sup> See Russell (1918, 1919).

<sup>22</sup> While working under the assumption that definite descriptions are general terms, some theorists refuse to adopt Russell’s analysis of the definite article. Focusing upon plural, mass, and anaphoric definite descriptions, as well as singular descriptions, Vendler (1967), Chomsky (1975), Hawkins (1978, 1991), Sharvy (1980), and, most recently, Bach (2004) have maintained that ‘the’ is best understood as a universal quantifier. In these cases, the indefinite/definite contrast would reduce to the contrast between ‘some’ and ‘all’. I find this stance hard to square with the fact that speakers can use ‘a’ and ‘the’ to create anaphoric chains but cannot use ‘some’ and ‘all’ in the same manner. As we noted in 1.2.3, fn. 9, Szabó (2000, 2003, 2005), and Ludlow and Segal (2004) propose that ‘the’ is equivalent to ‘some’ and thus equivalent to ‘a’. On this provocative proposal, ‘a’ and ‘the’ do not form a semantic contrast set or a Horn scale. Obviously, this proposal is quite troubling for our enterprise. In 3.3.6.3, fn. 67, we present a critique of this proposal.

<sup>23</sup> As we saw in 1.2.2, a set  $\lceil \Gamma \rceil$  is a semantic contrast set *iff* it conforms to  $\mathbf{D}_4$ :

**(D<sub>4</sub>) Semantic Contrast Set.**  $|\Gamma| \geq 2$  and  $\Gamma$ ’s members satisfy the lexical restriction, aboutness restriction, and non-synonymy restriction.

can provide a straightforward demonstration that **A** composes a semantic contrast set. The aboutness restriction is met since the articles, like quantifier determiners generally, are assigned the same kind of entity, namely a binary function from properties to truth-values.<sup>24</sup> The INDEF. and DEF. functions are non-synonymous as well. Thus, **A** meets the non-synonymy restriction. ‘The’ and ‘some’, by extension, also form a semantic contrast set. Furthermore, **A** becomes a subset of a larger semantic contrast set; it is a subset of the set of quantifier determiners. In that larger set, ‘a’ and ‘some’ are listed as one entry to avoid violating the non-synonymy restriction.

Russell’s account also entails that the articles compose Horn scales.<sup>25</sup>  $\lceil P(\text{the } F) \rceil$  semantically entails  $\lceil P(\text{an } F) \rceil$ .<sup>26</sup> Whereas  $\lceil P(\text{an } F) \rceil$  does not semantically entail  $\lceil P(\text{the } F) \rceil$ . Consequently, the ordered pair  $\langle \text{‘the’}, \text{‘a’} \rangle$  meets the entailment restriction as well as the lexical, and aboutness restrictions. By **D**<sub>3</sub>, then,  $\langle \text{‘the’}, \text{‘a’} \rangle$  constitutes a Horn scale. The ordered pair  $\langle \text{‘a’}, \text{‘the’} \rangle$ , on the other hand, fails to meet the entailment restriction. By **D**<sub>3</sub>,  $\langle \text{‘a’}, \text{‘the’} \rangle$  does not constitute a Horn scale. Now, given Russell’s semantics, if we apply wide-scope negation to (1) (i.e.  $\lceil \text{An } F \text{ is } G \rceil$ ) and (2) (i.e.  $\lceil \text{The } F \text{ is } G \rceil$ ), we get (5):

5.  $\sim P(\text{an } F) \vDash \sim P(\text{the } F)$ .

<sup>24</sup> Subsequently, an explanation of the contrastive feel of focused descriptions is obtained. The contrastive feel of (12) in 1.2.3 is due to the assertion of existence and the immediate denial of uniqueness of the role of Islamic law in Iraq’s legislative process. The contrastive feel of (13) in 1.2.3 is due to the assertion of uniqueness and the denial of the mere existence of the role of Islamic law in Iraq’s legislative process.

<sup>25</sup> In 1.2.1, Horn scales received the following treatment:

(**D**<sub>3</sub>) *Horn Scale*. An ordered tuple  $\lceil \langle \alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_n, \beta \rangle \rceil$  is a Horn scale iff  $\langle \alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_n, \beta \rangle$  satisfies the lexical restriction, aboutness restriction, and entailment restriction.

Now, Hawkins (1991) proposed that  $\langle \text{‘the’}, \text{‘a/some’} \rangle$  constitutes a Horn scale. He uses this proposal to sketch an account of the indefinite/definite contrast. See Levinson (2000) as well.

<sup>26</sup> Even though Russell didn’t work with a notion of a Horn scale, he mentions this entailment pattern: Thus propositions about ‘the so-and-so’ always imply the corresponding propositions about ‘a so-and-so’. (1919: 176).

The opposite, however, does not hold. Thus, where negation takes wide scope, <‘~a’, ‘~the’> also constitute a Horn scale. By extension, <‘the’, ‘some’> and <‘~some’, ‘~the’> are Horn scales too.

Interestingly, the articles do not always participate in the same Horn scales. There are many Horn scales that exclude ‘the’ but invite ‘a’. For example, <‘most’, ..., ‘a’> is a Horn scale; <‘most’, ..., ‘the’> is not. Given Russell’s account, this divergence is predictable. The divergence is a consequence of the fact that the uniqueness condition only governs the DEF. function.<sup>27</sup> The fact that Russell’s account predicts such a divergence is a strong argument in favor of adopting it.

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<sup>27</sup> Under a Russellian analysis, we can map the articles’ monotonic properties. Let ‘**Q**’ stand for a quantifier determiner and let  $\mathbf{F}' \subseteq \mathbf{F}$  and  $\mathbf{G}' \subseteq \mathbf{G}$ . In that case:

(**M**<sub>1</sub>): **Q** is *left increasing monotonic* iff  $[Q x: F'x] (Gx) \vDash [Q x: Fx] (Gx)$ .

(**M**<sub>2</sub>): **Q** is *left decreasing monotonic* iff  $[Q x: Fx] (Gx) \vDash [Q x: F'x] (Gx)$ .

(**M**<sub>3</sub>): **Q** is *right increasing monotonic* iff  $[Q x: Fx] (G'x) \vDash [Q x: Fx] (Gx)$ .

(**M**<sub>4</sub>): **Q** is *right decreasing monotonic* iff  $[Q x: Fx] (Gx) \vDash [Q x: Fx] (G'x)$ .

A quick check reveals that the articles are right increasing monotonic but neither left decreasing monotonic nor right decreasing monotonic. Observe:

(**M**<sub>2</sub>') :  $[An x: man x] (runs x) \neq [An x: man x \ \& \ tall x] (runs x)$ .  
 $[The x: man x] (runs x) \neq [The x: man x \ \& \ tall x] (runs x)$ .

(**M**<sub>3</sub>') :  $[An x: man x] (runs-fast x) \vDash [An x: man x] (runs x)$ .  
 $[The x: man x] (runs-fast x) \vDash [The x: man x] (runs x)$ .

(**M**<sub>4</sub>') :  $[An x: man x] (runs x) \neq [An x: man x] (runs-fast x)$ .  
 $[The x: man x] (runs x) \neq [The x: man x] (runs-fast x)$ .

Interestingly, however, the articles diverge with respect to left increasing monotonicity. The indefinite article is left increasing monotonic, whereas the definite article is not:

(**M**<sub>1</sub>') :  $[An x: man x \ \& \ tall x] (runs x) \vDash [An x: man x] (runs x)$ .  
 $[The x: man x \ \& \ tall x] (runs x) \neq [The x: man x] (runs x)$ .

This divergence, of course, is directly traceable to the ‘at most’ reading of definite descriptions. That is, it is directly traceable to the uniqueness condition. Consider, for instance, the divergence between ‘at least five’ (i.e.  $\lceil [At \text{ least five } x: Fx] (Gx) \rceil$  is true iff  $|\mathbf{F} \cap \mathbf{G}| \geq 5$ .) and ‘exactly five’ (i.e.  $\lceil [Exactly \text{ five } x: Fx] (Gx) \rceil$  is true iff  $|\mathbf{F} \cap \mathbf{G}| = 5$ .):

(**M**<sub>1</sub>'') :  $[At \text{ least five } x: man x \ \& \ tall x] (runs x) \vDash [At \text{ least five } x: man x] (runs x)$ .  
 $[Exactly \text{ five } x: man x \ \& \ tall x] (runs x) \neq [Exactly \text{ five } x: man x] (runs x)$ .

See Barwise and Cooper (1981), Partee, ter Meulen, and Wall (1990), and Neale (2004) for an overview of monotonicity and **GQ**.

### 2.2.2 Russell's Account and the Four Tests

Russell's contention that descriptions are general terms naturally leads to an analysis of the articles as binary functions. This analysis, in turn, leads to an account of the indefinite/definite contrast as a contrast centering upon uniqueness entailments. Obviously, then, it is very important that Russell's contention have a sound foundation. By utilizing the lessons learned in 2.1.2, Russell's contention seems to gain that foundation.<sup>28</sup> Let's consider each lesson in turn.

It is a fact of zoology that the world is unicorn free. Consequently, the indefinite description 'a unicorn' is empty. The emptiness test, remember, maintains that if a **DP** is empty and an utterance of a sentence-token containing it expresses a proposition, then the **DP** is a general term. Now, an utterance of (6) expresses a false proposition:

6. A unicorn has two wings.

Thus by the emptiness test, indefinite descriptions are general terms. If indefinite descriptions were singular terms, the proposition would be false *iff* the referent of the

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<sup>28</sup> Russell (1905, 1911, 1918, 1919, 1927) provided numerous arguments in support of his contention that descriptions are general terms. The arguments sketched here are not intended as an exhaustive list of all of Russell's arguments. Those interested in such a list should consult Sainsbury (1979). One argument that we shall skip over is one that found much favor with Kaplan (1972). In *Descriptions*, Russell explains that if indefinite descriptions are singular terms, then the proposition expressed by an utterance of (i) would be a contradiction if I had in fact met Jones:

- (i). I met a man, but it was not Jones.

If indefinite descriptions are singular terms, then the most plausible referent of 'a man' in (i) is Jones. In which case, the proposition expressed is a contradiction. But although I lie in such circumstances, I do not contradict myself. Thus, indefinite descriptions are not singular terms. Kaplan focuses upon (ii):

- (ii). A Senator from New York is supporting Rockefeller, and a senator from New York is not supporting Rockefeller.

In brief, if indefinite descriptions were singular terms, then the proposition expressed by an utterance of (ii) would be a contradiction, since it would assert of the same individual that he is both supporting and not supporting Rockefeller.

These arguments, as stated, are unconvincing. As Kripke (pc) has jokingly remarked, if these arguments are good, then one should be able to use nursery rhymes to demonstrate that complex demonstratives are not singular terms. After all, the nursery school teacher does not contradict himself when he claims that:

- This little piggy** went to the market, **this little piggy** went home, **this little piggy** had roast beef, **this little piggy** had none. And **this little piggy** went 'wee, wee, wee' all the way home.

See Chastain (1975), and Ludlow and Neale (1991) for further discussion.

indefinite description didn't have two wings. But the indefinite description is empty, thus it can't have a referent. In fact, if indefinite descriptions were singular terms, the utterance would, contrary to fact, fail to express a proposition.

Treating indefinite descriptions as general terms, one can provide an explanation of the fact that a false proposition is expressed despite the emptiness of the **DP**. The proposition in question is a general proposition. It is true *iff* there is at least one unicorn that has two wings. Since there aren't any unicorns, there aren't any with two wings. So the proposition is false in virtue of the fact that the **DP** is empty. Indefinite descriptions, then, are general terms.<sup>29</sup>

The emptiness test extends to definite descriptions too.<sup>30</sup> By Peano's axioms, there is no greatest natural number. Accordingly, there isn't a greatest even number. So the **DP** 'the greatest even number' is empty. However, an utterance of (7) expresses a false proposition:

7. The greatest even number is prime.

Consequently, definite descriptions are also general terms. If definite descriptions are singular terms, then the proposition expressed by the utterance is false in virtue of the fact that the referent of the definite description is not a prime number. But the definite description is empty. So, if definite descriptions were singular terms, no proposition would be expressed by the utterance. That, however, is not the case.

Adopting Russell's semantics, one can readily explain why the proposition is false. Given Peano's axioms, the existential condition is not met. Thus, the DEF. function

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<sup>29</sup> See Russell (1918, 1919).

<sup>30</sup> See Russell (1905, 1911).

provides the value 'false'. This explanation supposes that definite descriptions are general terms. Russell contention receives support yet again.

The understanding test also rules in favor of Russell's contention. English speakers understand the propositions expressed by utterances of (6) and (7). If descriptions were singular terms, their understanding would be a product of an acquaintance with the referents of the descriptions. But, once again, the descriptions are empty. So, no one could, in principle, be acquainted with the referents of the descriptions. Thus, in order to account for the understandability of the propositions, one must treat descriptions as general terms.<sup>31</sup>

The same conclusion seems to follow even in cases where plausible referents can be found. Suppose that Sally met David Letterman while running through Central Park. On the basis of this perceptual experience, Sally utters (8) to Mary:

8. I met a man.

Mary, it seems, understands the proposition expressed by Sally's utterance. Now, if the indefinite description in (8) refers, David Letterman seems to be the most plausible referent. Let's, then, take David Letterman to be the referent. The proposition expressed by Sally's utterance, under this supposition, is true *iff* Sally met David Letterman. Mary, unfortunately, is not acquainted with David Letterman. Nor does she know that David Letterman is the referent of the purported singular term. Thus, Mary should not be able to understand Sally's utterance. However, Mary does understand Sally's utterance. She can, for example, give cases in which the proposition expressed by the utterance would be true or false. So, once again, indefinite descriptions appear to be general terms.

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<sup>31</sup> See Russell (1911, 1918, 1919).

Suppose that Sally utters (9)

9. I met the funniest man on Earth.

Mary, it appears, could understand what Sally has just said. Given that David Letterman is the funniest man on Earth, the most natural referent for the definite description is David Letterman himself. So, if definite descriptions are singular terms, then David Letterman is a constituent of the proposition expressed by Sally's utterance. Mary, then, must be acquainted with David Letterman in order to understand what Sally has said. But, let's remember, Mary is not acquainted with him. So, if definite descriptions are singular terms and, if the referent of the definite description in (9) is David Letterman, then Mary should fail to understand what Sally said. But surely Mary could understand what Sally had said. Consequently, definite descriptions behave like general terms.

The scope test provides further support for Russell's contention. For instance, replacements of 'x' by 'a man' in (A) (i.e. 'x is not mortal') and (B) (i.e. 'It is not the case that x is mortal') produce divergences in truth conditions. For example, the proposition expressed by an utterance of (A) is compatible with the existence of at least one man that is mortal. The proposition expressed by an utterance of (B), however, is not. Here is a clear divergence in truth conditions. The divergence is predicted by Russell's semantics. After all, (10) and (11) diverge in exactly the same manner:

10.  $[\text{An } x: \text{man } x] \sim (\text{mortal } x)$ .

11.  $\sim ([\text{An } x: \text{man } x] (\text{mortal } x))$ .

By the scope test, then, indefinite descriptions are general terms.

The case of definite descriptions mirrors the case of indefinite descriptions. Russell famously discovered a divergence in truth conditions in environments such as (A) and

(B). When ‘the present king of France’ replaces ‘ $x$ ’ in (A), an utterance of the completed sentence-token expresses a false proposition if France is not a monarchy. However, if ‘ $x$ ’ is replaced by the same description in (B), the proposition expressed is true if France is not a monarchy. Once again, Russell’s semantics predicts this divergence:

12. [The  $x$ : king ( $x$ , *France*)] ~ (mortal  $x$ ).

13. ~ ([The  $x$ : king ( $x$ , *France*)] (mortal  $x$ )).

The scope test, then, entails that descriptions are general terms. Only general terms can trigger scopal ambiguity. Descriptions trigger scopal ambiguities. Thus, one must conclude that they are general terms. Unsurprisingly, this is just what Russell contends.<sup>32</sup>

Finally we arrive at the modal test. If descriptions are general terms, then at least some descriptions should fail to rigidly designate. But is that the case? Let’s investigate.

Suppose that Russell had met only one man named ‘Jones’ his whole life, namely Jones Smith. Here, the indefinite description in (14) designates Jones Smith.

14. Russell met a man whose first name was ‘Jones’.

Of course, there is another counterfactual situation where Russell did not meet Jones Smith. Rather he met Jones Brown. Here, the indefinite description in (14) designates another individual. Accordingly, the indefinite description ‘a man whose first name was

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<sup>32</sup> Russell puts the argument with respect to definite descriptions in this way:

If you want to deny the proposition ‘The present King of France is bald’, you can do it by denying that he exists, instead of by denying that he is bald. In order to deny this statement that the present King of France is bald, which is a statement consisting of two parts, you can proceed by denying either part. You can deny the one part, which would lead you to suppose that the present King of France exists but is not bald, or the other part, which will lead you to the denial that the present King of France exists; and either of those two denials will lead you to the falsehood of the proposition ‘The present King of France is bald’. When you say ‘Scott is human’ there is no possibility of a double denial. The only way you can deny ‘Scott is human’ is by saying ‘Scott is not human’. But where a descriptive phrase occurs, you do have the double possibility of denial. (1918: 251).

‘Jones’ is a nonrigid designator. Applying the modal test, we see that indefinite descriptions are general terms.

Now consider the status of definite descriptions. In the actual world, the definite description in (15) designates David Letterman:

15. The host of the Late Night Show in 2008 was born in Indiana.

In the actual world, an utterance of (15) is true in virtue of how matters stand with David Letterman. The utterance expresses a true proposition *iff* he was born in Indiana. Since David Letterman is indeed a native of Indiana, the utterance expresses a true proposition. Now, if ‘the host of the Late Night Show in 2008’ is a rigid designator, then it should designate David Letterman in every counterfactual situation in which he exists. But, consider the following counterfactual situation. In order to spend more time with his family, David Letterman retires from the Late Night Show on December 31, 2007. As a consequence of his retirement, Conan O’Brien receives Letterman’s job on January 1, 2008. In this counterfactual situation, an utterance of (15), so it seems, would be true or false in virtue of how matters stand with Conan O’Brien. In this situation, the definite description in (15) designates Conan O’Brien. So, the definite description in (15) designates different individuals in different counterfactual situations. Consequently, at least some definite descriptions are nonrigid designators. By the modal test, then, definite descriptions are general terms.

Our four tests, then, seem to provide a sound foundation for Russell’s contention that definite descriptions are general terms. Descriptions have properties that belong exclusively to general terms. Thus, they ought to be categorized as such. This categorization entails that the articles denote binary functions. That entailment seems to

demand Russell's account of the indefinite/definite contrast. Everything seems on the up and up.

## **2.3 A Modification**

### *2.3.1 A Problem: Predictions and Informed Assessments*

Left in its naïve state, Russell's account of the articles is quickly confronted with a problem. In many cases, Russell's account seems to run into conflict with the semantical assessments of informed speakers. His truth conditions seem too permissive. This permissiveness leads to a clash with an important form of semantical data. Left in its naïve state, then, Russell's account fails. To see this, let's turn to some specific cases.

On a naïve reading, Russell's treatment of the indefinite article seems too permissive to informed assessments. Suppose that Sally and Mary are in Sally's Long Island kitchen. Suppose that eight coffee cups are on her countertop. Each coffee cup is filled with coffee. Focusing on the coffee cups, Sally utters:

1. A coffee cup is filled with soda.

In this situation, Sally has asserted a false proposition. Now suppose that, unbeknownst to Sally and Mary, there is one coffee cup filled with soda in a kitchen in China. Under this assumption, Russell's account seems to predict that Sally has asserted a true proposition; at least one coffee cup is filled with soda. Here we have a conflict between our semantical assessments and Russell's account. Given this new information about China, our informed observations still lead us to conclude that Sally has asserted a false proposition. In the current context, it is just too permissive to let unknown objects in a foreign land determine the truth-value of the proposition expressed. Russell, however,

seems to be forced to conclude that Sally has asserted a true proposition in virtue of the coffee cup in China.

Russell's account of the definite article faces the same kind of difficulty.

Traditionally, the specific difficulty with definite descriptions has been labeled 'the problem of incompleteness'. To illustrate the problem let's return to Sally's kitchen.

Suppose this time that there is one and only one coffee cup in Sally's kitchen. Mary, in order to quench her thirst, fills every coffee cup in Sally's kitchen with soda. Gazing upon every coffee cup in her kitchen, Sally utters:

2. The coffee cup is filled with soda.

In this context, Sally has asserted a true proposition. Russell, however, would seem to have us judge otherwise. Remember, our world contains more than one coffee cup.

Accordingly, the proposition expressed by Sally's utterance seemingly fails to satisfy the uniqueness condition. The definite description is said to be 'incomplete' since more than one individual satisfies the property the **NP** complement denotes.<sup>33</sup> Hence, we arrive at the problem of incompleteness.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> As Neale (2004: 120 – 121; 129 – 137) observes, the difference between our assessments regarding 'incomplete' indefinite descriptions and 'incomplete' definite descriptions centers upon the articles divergence with respect to left increasing monotonicity.

<sup>34</sup> In his famous critique of Russell's theory of definite descriptions, Strawson (1950) argues for an account of definite descriptions as singular terms from, among other things, the problem of incompleteness. Russell, of course, was well aware of this problem prior to Strawson's article. In *On Denoting*, Russell explains that speakers use 'the son of so-and-so' even though 'so-and-so' has more than one son. For Russell, it would be more correct for speakers to use the indefinite counterpart 'a son of so-and-so'. For Russell (1905, 1927), strict uses of the definite article must entail uniqueness. Nowadays, semanticists generally acknowledge that the road to treating descriptions as singular terms from the problem of incompleteness is not worth traveling. Neale puts the point this way:

Incomplete descriptions are an argumentative dead-end: no matter how devious the example, how sparse the description, or how convoluted the context, it is always possible to generate essentially the same problem using a description that is uncontroversially **non**-referential, or some other **NP** that is uncontroversially quantificational. (2000b: 284). (His emphasis).

For a different take, see Devitt (2004). Later, in 3.3.6.2, we will, following Wilson (1991) and Devitt, argue that in some cases incompleteness is not an argumentative dead-end.

At this point it is important to note that the above problems are not limited to Russell's treatment of the articles. Rather, the problems apply to semantical analyses of quantifier determiners generally.<sup>35</sup> For example, one runs into the same difficulties with uncontroversial quantifier determiners. Consider the quantifier determiner 'every'. Suppose that all eight coffee cups in Sally's kitchen are filled with soda. Surely an utterance of (3) expresses a true proposition:

3. Every coffee cup is filled with soda.

But now suppose that a coffee cup in China is empty. A naïve application of the EVERY function entails that the proposition expressed by an utterance of (3) is false. Our informed semantical assessments and our semantical analysis diverge.

The problem, as one can see, is quite general. It's a problem for all naïve accounts of quantifier determiners. Surely, then, it is not surprising that it should be a problem for Russell's naïve account. In fact, it would be surprising if these clashes didn't arise, since the problem in question is specific to quantifier determiners. Nonetheless, one doesn't want to be stuck with these apparent clashes. Let's, then, sketch some ways of handling the ubiquitous problem of quantifier domain restriction.

### 2.3.2 *Some Solutions*

By slightly modifying it, Russell's account can be made to coalesce with our informed assessments. These slight modifications typically come in two varieties. Neale (1990) labels the first type of modification the 'explicit' approach and the second type the

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<sup>35</sup> See Sainsbury (1979), Davies (1981), and Neale (1990).

‘implicit’ approach. Adopting the explicit approach, the Russellian modifies language. Adopting the implicit approach, the Russellian modifies the world.<sup>36</sup>

On the explicit approach, one views the speaker’s use of the above **DPs** as elliptical for ‘fuller’ **DPs** they could have or would have used.<sup>37</sup> The proposition expressed by an utterance containing an elliptical use of the **DP** is understood as the proposition expressed by an utterance containing the non-elliptical **DP**.<sup>38</sup> In this manner, the Russellian modifies language. The net result of this modification is a convergence of our informed semantical assessments with Russell’s account.

Consider (1) (i.e. ‘A coffee cup is filled with soda.’) again. Instead of using ‘a coffee cup’, Sally could have used the fuller **DP** ‘a coffee cup in here’. And, one imagines, if Sally were asked to be more ‘explicit’, she would fall back on this kind of fuller **DP**. Thus, on the explicit approach, the proposition expressed by Sally’s utterance of (1) is true *iff* at least one coffee cup in Sally’s kitchen is filled with soda. The coffee cup in China becomes irrelevant to the truth-value of the proposition expressed. And, more importantly, Russell’s account of the indefinite article provides the correct predictions in this case.

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<sup>36</sup> See Neale (2004).

<sup>37</sup> Here’s Sellars:

It should be clear that the sentence ‘The table is large’ is ambiguous in **both** ways. In the first place, a given utterance of it is elliptical and states what would be nonelliptically stated, for example, by ‘the table **over here** is large’. (1954: 200). (His emphasis).

<sup>38</sup> Quine tells us:

Everyday use of descriptions is indeed often elliptical...thus we may say simply ‘the yellow house’...when what is to be understood is rather ‘the yellow house in the third block of Lee Street, Tulsa’. (1940: 146).

See also Sellars (1954), Donnellan (1968), Sainsbury (1979), and Neale (1990, 2000b, 2004, 2005b).

On the implicit approach, the context of the utterance supplies a domain of discourse.<sup>39</sup> The proposition expressed is assessed against the contextually supplied domain. A Russellian who adopts the implicit approach severely shrinks the relevant aspects of the universe. In this manner, the Russellian modifies the world.

Adopting the implicit approach, the proposition expressed by an utterance of (2) (i.e. ‘The coffee cup is filled with soda.’) is assessed against a domain of discourse **D**. The only objects in **D** are those objects in Sally’s kitchen. Against **D**, Russell’s analysis predicts that the proposition expressed by an utterance of (2) is true. Thus, on the implicit approach, Russell’s analysis and our informed semantical assessments coalesce.

On both accounts, a speaker’s communicative intentions play a pivotal role. On the explicit approach, it is the speaker’s communicative intention which determines the more explicit **DP** he would fall back on. Much is the same with the implicit approach. On that approach, the speaker’s communicative intention determines the appropriate domain of discourse.

Although most philosophers sympathetic to Russell’s account adopt either the explicit or implicit approach, other approaches are possible. Following Stanley (2000), and Stanley and Szabó (2000), for example, one could adopt what might be called the ‘hidden indexical’ approach. On their formulation, **Ns** are ordered pairs composed of a noun and an aphonic element whose semantic contribution is the contextual variable  $\lceil f(i) \rceil$ . The contextual variable is composed of the individual variable  $\lceil i \rceil$  and the function variable  $\lceil f \rceil$ . The noun and the contextual variable are said to co-habit **N**. So, for example, the syntactic structure of ‘cup’ is not:

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<sup>39</sup> See Hawkins (1978), Davies (1981), Barwise and Perry (1983), and Reimer (1998b).

4. [<sub>N</sub> cup].

Rather, it is:

5. [<sub>N</sub> <cup,  $f(i)$ >].

Now, the context of an utterance assigns, in some principled manner, an object to  $\lceil i \rceil$  and a function from objects to domains of discourse to  $\lceil f \rceil$ . The value of the contextual variable, then, provides a domain of discourse. The domain of discourse reigns in the reach of the **DP**. In this way, we achieve unity among our informed semantical assessments and Russell's account.

On the hidden indexical approach, each part of the proposition expressed can be traced back to elements within the syntax of the sentence. Context plays a significant role. Its role, however, is severely constrained by syntax. Context determines the domain of discourse in the same manner as it determines the value of phonologically full indexicals such as 'I' or 'here', hence the name. Accordingly, the hidden indexical approach is distinct from both the implicit and explicit approaches. The latter approaches do not make reference to a phonetic element within syntax. Rather, they rely on extra-linguistic features of communication to achieve their results.

Each of these approaches has its advantages and disadvantages. The literature documenting each approach's merits and faults is as vast as it is interesting. Accordingly, a review of this literature would require a second dissertation. Such a review, then, is not in the offing.<sup>40</sup> Rather, we will simply trade on the explicit and implicit approaches. By

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<sup>40</sup> For a good small survey see Donnellan (1968), Lewis (1979), Wettstein (1981), Soames (1986), Schiffer (1995), Stanley and Williamson (1995), Reimer (1998b), Neale (1990, 2000b, 2004, 2005b), Ostertag (1998, 1999), Stanley and Szabó (2000), Devitt (2004), and Buchanan and Ostertag (2005).

utilizing these two approaches, we can provide a Russellian account of the complementary relationship holding between the articles.

## 2.4 Anaphoric Chains Revisited

As we saw in 1.3.2, indefinite and definite descriptions can enter into anaphoric chains. A semantic account of such anaphoric chains must meet at least two requirements. First, it must provide adequate truth conditions for the propositions expressed by utterances linked by anaphoric chains. In particular, it must provide an account of how the propositions expressed could, in some circumstances, be true together. Second, it must account for the fact that the anaphoric chains are ‘about’ the same individual. It must account for the fact that speakers employ anaphoric chains to talk about the same individual. If an account of anaphoric chains cannot meet both requirements, then it is an immediate failure.

Before turning to the Russellian account of anaphoric chains, it will be useful to have some set formalisms and terminology. We will mark the antecedent with a superscript  $^{\alpha}$ , anaphors with a subscript  $_{\alpha}$ . The smallest sentence containing the antecedent will be called the ‘antecedent sentence’; the smallest sentence containing the anaphor will be called the ‘anaphoric sentence’. The proposition expressed by an utterance of an antecedent sentence-token will be called an ‘antecedent proposition’. The proposition expressed by an utterance of an anaphoric sentence-token will be called an ‘anaphoric proposition’.

### 2.4.1 A Russellian Account of Description-based Anaphoric Chains

Now, consider (1):

1. A man<sup>1</sup> was jogging. The man<sub>1</sub> looked tired.

Obviously, the antecedent and anaphoric propositions could be true together. The Russellian must account for this possibility. On a modified Russellian account, the antecedent proposition is true relative to the domain of discourse **D** iff in **D**:

2. [An  $x$ : man  $x$ ] (jogging  $x$ ).

The antecedent proposition is compatible with the existence of more than one man in **D**.

The anaphoric proposition, at first blush, appears to be true relative to **D** iff in **D**:

3. [The  $x$ : man  $x$ ] (looked-tired  $x$ ).

The anaphoric proposition, then, seems to be incompatible with the existence of more than one man in **D**. But that conclusion is unsavory. Suppose that Jones was jogging and he looked tired. In this case, the antecedent proposition is true. The anaphoric proposition, however, is false since **D** includes Smith, who never jogs at all.

Nonetheless, Smith's existence, in this context, is simply irrelevant to the truth or falsity of the anaphoric proposition. All that is relevant to the truth or falsity of the anaphoric proposition is whether Jones, the jogger, was tired or not. Consequently, some fix needs to be introduced to remedy this unsavory result.

Following Vendler (1967) and Davies (1981), one could hold that an utterance of the anaphoric sentence in (1) is 'naturally' interpreted as:

4. The man **who was jogging** looked tired.

Adopting the explicit approach, one can claim that an utterance of the anaphoric sentence is naturally taken as elliptical for an utterance containing a fuller **DP**. The fuller **DP** contains the predicate of the antecedent as an adjunct.<sup>41</sup> On this gloss, the anaphoric proposition is true relative to **D** iff in **D**:

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<sup>41</sup> Vendler held that anaphoric chains employ syntactic ellipsis:  
Consider the following sequence:

5. [The  $x$ : man  $x$  & jogging  $x$ ] (looked-tired  $x$ ).

So the anaphoric proposition is compatible with **D** containing more than one man. It is not, however, compatible with **D** containing more than one jogging man. So both propositions could be true together *iff* there is one and only one man in **D** who was jogging and every man who was jogging in **D** looked tired. Smith's existence is rendered irrelevant in assessing the truth-value of the anaphoric proposition. The unsavory conclusion is circumvented. So the Russellian, by employing both the explicit and implicit approaches, can provide adequate truth conditions for some propositions linked by anaphoric chains. The antecedent and anaphoric propositions are true relative to **D** *iff* in **D** (5) is true.<sup>42</sup>

On this account, the anaphoric chains are 'about' the same individual. The antecedent proposition is true in virtue of one individual. The anaphor uniquely denotes that individual. So, the anaphoric proposition is true in virtue of the same individual. Even though the propositions expressed do not contain individuals as constituents, they are, in some intuitive sense, 'about' the same individual. The anaphoric chains are 'about' the one individual that uniquely satisfies the anaphor in **D**.

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I saw a man. The man wore a hat.

Obviously, the man I saw wore a hat. 'The', here indicates a deleted but recoverable restrictive adjunct based upon a previous occurrence of the same noun in an identifying context. (1967: 45 – 6). Davies (1981) suggests that the interpretation can best be explained by appeal to a general theory of context dependence. See Neale (1990) as well.

<sup>42</sup> There is, of course, another Russellian analysis available. According to Kripke (1973), an utterance of 'A man was jogging. The man looked tired.' expresses (iii) and (iv) respectively:

(iii). [An  $x$ : man  $x$ ] (jogging  $x$ ).

(iv). [The  $y$ : man  $y$  &  $x = y$ ] (looked-tired  $y$ ).

Here, an utterance of the definite description 'the man' goes proxy for something like an utterance of 'the man in question'. The phrase 'in question' provides ' $x = y$ '. For his part, Kripke believes that this analysis won't handle the dialogue below. For further discussion, see 3.4.2, especially fn. 91.

Thus, a modified Russellian semantics for the articles can provide an account of anaphoric chains that seems to meet the two requirements set out above. It provides appropriate truth conditions. Furthermore, it explains the way in which anaphoric chains are about the same individual. So far, Russell's semantics, in its modified form, appears to provide an adequate account of anaphoric chains.

#### 2.4.2 A Problem: 'Elliptical' Contradiction

But there is always a catch. Consider the following dialogue:

6. (a) John: A man was jogging.  
 (b) Sally: The man wasn't jogging.

The elliptical approach seems to predict that Sally's response to John is contradictory.

Adopting the elliptical approach, Sally's utterance seems to be elliptical for 'the man who was jogging wasn't jogging'. Accordingly, the proposition expressed by Sally's utterance is true in **D** iff in **D**:

7. [The  $x$ : man  $x$  & jogging  $x$ ]  $\sim$  (jogging  $x$ ).

The proposition, then, is a contradiction. But surely Sally's utterance does not express a contradiction. Sally is countering John's assertion. Now, if Sally's counter-assertion is contradictory, then John's assertion is a logical truth. John's assertion, however, is no logical truth. The elliptical approach appears to be in serious trouble.

While defending a disguised description approach to unbound anaphoric pronouns, Davies provides a strategy for handling these problematic cases. The elliptical approach holds that the definite description is elliptical for a fuller **DP**. This fuller **DP** does indeed contain descriptive material retrievable from the antecedent. But in cases such as (6b), the speaker uses, or would use, that descriptive material ironically. For example, if forced, Sally would fall back upon 'the man "who was jogging"', uttering the adjunct in

scare quotes in an **ironical manner**. Sally does not assert that one and only one man was both jogging and not jogging. Rather, Sally's asserts that:

8. [The  $x$ : man  $x$  & said-to-have-been-jogging  $x$ ]  $\sim$  (jogging  $x$ ).<sup>43</sup>

(8) is not a contradiction. Thus, the elliptical approach does not entail that Sally's assertion is a contradiction, nor that John's assertion is a logical truth. The elliptical approach does not diverge from our informed semantical assessments of Sally's utterance. As Ludlow and Neale (1991) observe, speakers do, from time to time, use 'complete' descriptions ironically. So one ought to expect that speakers could use elliptical descriptions ironically too. This is exactly what the Russellian maintains that Sally does in (6b).<sup>44</sup>

#### 2.4.3 A Final Issue: The Anaphoric Chain Problem

The Russellian is not out of the woods yet. Notice that, on certain occasions, a conversation that begins with a definite description is infelicitous. Let's illustrate.

Sally and John meet for the first time on a deserted island. Coconut trees populate the landscape. Remembering Jones, his coconut-loving co-worker, John initiates this conversation:

9. (a) A man I work with loves coconuts. (b) The guy would be happy here.

According to the Russellian, John's utterance expresses (10) and (11) respectively:

10. [An  $x$ : man  $x$  & works-with ( $x$ , *John*)] (loves ( $x$ , *Coconuts*)).

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<sup>43</sup> See Ludlow and Neale (1991).

<sup>44</sup> Still, leaning on irony here seems out of place. Speakers typically utter sentence-tokens such as (6b) without the slightest auditory sign that they are using the description-token ironically and yet their utterances are not interpreted as asserting contradictions or as infelicitous. Whereas, a speaker who uttered 'the man who was jogging wasn't jogging' without ironic auditory cues would certainly be taken as asserting a contradiction or, more generously, as producing an infelicitous utterance.

11. [The  $x$ : man  $x$  & ((works-with ( $x$ , *John*)) & (loves ( $x$ , *Coconuts*)))]  
(happy-at ( $x$ , *Here*)).

Sally, of course, understands John. John's utterance is completely felicitous. So far, so good.

Drawing upon previous discussions, one can maintain two things. First, one can hold that the antecedent and anaphoric propositions are true just in case (11) is assessed against an appropriate domain of discourse. Second, one can hold that John's utterance of (9b) is elliptical for an utterance of (12):

12. The man I work with **who loves coconuts** would be happy here.

Within Russell's framework, then, John's utterance of (12) also expresses (11). For the Russellian, then, John's utterance of (9) and (12) are equivalent with respect to their understandability; they have identical truth-conditions.

As such, let's have John initiate a conversation with an utterance of (12). After all, we don't want John to say more than he has to. Notice, however, that John's new conversational initiative has an unexpected result. In particular, John's utterance is infelicitous. The infelicity, in turn, affects understandability. Apparently, Sally does not understand John. She gives, as it were, a 'huh' response; she tells John she has no clue what he is talking about. Politely, she asks John to express his thought in a more congenial manner.

Now, if (9) and (12) are equivalent with respect to understandability, John's use of (12) shouldn't be infelicitous and, more importantly, Sally ought to understand what John has said. This, however, isn't the case. And this presents the Russellian with a problem, namely the 'anaphoric chain' problem:

**(AP) *The Anaphoric Chain Problem.*** Why can an audience understand an utterance of a sentence-token containing an anaphoric chain that an indefinite description initiates and a definite description continues but fail to understand an utterance of a sentence-token containing an ‘equivalent’ definite description in the same context?

The anaphoric chain problem, it seems, casts serious doubt upon the legitimacy of a purely Russellian analysis of descriptions. If Russell’s analysis is correct, then one shouldn’t get a divergence in the understandability of what is said by utterances of (9) (i.e. ‘A man I work with loves coconuts. The guy would be happy here.’) and (12) (i.e. ‘The man I work with who loves coconuts would be happy here.’). We do, however, get such a divergence. Accordingly, Russell’s analysis seems illegitimate.

When we turn to the root cause of Sally’s lack of understanding, the Russellian’s plight is only exasperated. Obviously, Sally’s lack of understanding cannot be a product of her inability to understand the lexical items that compose (12). With the trivial exception of ‘who’, each item contained in (12) is also contained in (9). Rather, it seems that Sally does not understand John’s utterance of (12) in the above context because Sally is **unacquainted** with Jones as the definite description’s designation. Contrary to the Russellian’s contention, then, an audience’s acquaintance with the denotation of a definite description appears to be, **in some circumstances**, a necessary condition of the audience’s ability to understand an utterance containing the definite description.

This ought to trouble the Russellian. If definite descriptions are simply general terms, then Sally’s acquaintance with Jones as the definite description’s designation in (12) should be irrelevant for grasping what John says. But apparently it isn’t. So, perhaps it’s reasonable to conclude that definite descriptions are not simply general terms. Perhaps, then, indefinite descriptions are not simply general terms either. Perhaps

it is reasonable to maintain that Russell's account of the indefinite/definite contrast is only part of a much more complicated story.

## 2.5 Conclusions

This seems like a good time to recount our accomplishments. First, the distinction between singular and general terms was presented. Next, we saw that Russell held that descriptions were general terms. This contention led him to treat descriptions as quantifier phrases. Subsequently, the articles were taken to be binary functions. Russell then formulated the semantic contrast between indefinite and definite descriptions in terms of uniqueness entailments. On Russell's account, we saw that <'the', 'a'> and <'~a', '~the'> constitute Horn scales. After looking at the problem of quantifier domain restriction, we modified Russell's semantical account by adopting the explicit and implicit approaches. Adopting these approaches, a Russellian account of anaphoric chains was presented. Although this account could meet two important requirements, it left the Russellian in a troubling position. We begin with this troubling position in the next chapter.

## Chapter 3

### Convention and Ambiguity: The Diligent Man's Approach to the Articles

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#### 3.0 Introduction

With the close of chapter 2, we observed that some uses of definite descriptions can be understood only if the audience is acquainted with the description's denotation as the description's denotation. This observation cast doubt upon Russell's account of definite descriptions as general terms. In chapter 3, we move to undermine Russell's account of indefinite, as well as definite, descriptions. Specifically, we shall argue that the articles are ambiguous between quantificational and referential meanings. At best, then, Russell's account of the articles is incomplete. Consequently, Russell's account of the indefinite/definite contrast comes under suspicion. If the articles are not univocally quantificational, then, perhaps, the articles diverge in a manner that does not turn on their quantificational meanings.

Our journey begins with Donnellan. In 3.1, we present Donnellan's distinction. Along with his distinction, we present the ambiguity thesis it invites. This thesis states that the articles are ambiguous between quantificational and referential meanings. In 3.2, we introduce two Russellian approaches to Donnellan's distinction: the pragmatic approach and the Gödelian approach. The next section, 3.3, centers upon the pragmatic approach. On empirical and methodological grounds, we argue that the ambiguity thesis is preferable to the pragmatic approach. In 3.4, the same conclusion is reached with respect to the Gödelian approach. Accordingly, we adopt the ambiguity thesis; we conclude that Russell's account is, at best, incomplete.

### 3.1 Russell's Semantics, Donnellan's Distinction, and the Ambiguity Thesis

#### 3.1.1 Donnellan's Distinction

On Russell's account, utterances of sentence-tokens containing description-tokens in the subject position express general propositions. While the propositions expressed might be 'about' individuals, in some intuitive sense of 'about', the propositions do not contain such individuals as constituents. Nor is acquaintance with such individuals requisite for understanding the propositions expressed. In fact, both the speaker and his audience could be completely ignorant of the description's denotation and yet communication succeeds.

Now, it is certainly the case that many token uses of descriptions conform to Russell's account. Consider current political conversations. Although no one now knows who will occupy the office of the Presidency in 2009, one can assert, perhaps correctly, that '**the** president of the United States in 2009 will be male'. Furthermore, although no one now knows who will give the opening address at the Democratic Party's 2008 convention, one could assert that '**a** hawk will give it'. The study of recent polls and political trends furnish the grounds for such assertions. They are not furnished by knowing of *a* that *a* will be the President of the United States in 2009 and that *a* is male or by knowing of *b* that *b* is a hawk and that *b* will give the opening address. The speaker's usage of the descriptions is not guided by an intention to speak of particular individuals that satisfy the descriptions. In ordinary discourse, we might say that the speaker spoke without any individual in mind. Such uses of definite descriptions could be felicitously followed by the qualification 'whoever that is'. Such uses of indefinite

descriptions could be felicitously followed by the qualification ‘but I’m not sure which one’.

Such usage, of course, is not limited to discussions about the future. We regularly encounter this style of presentation in discussions about the past and present too. The philosophy department is decorated in an unusually self-important manner. This situation prompts a somewhat seasoned philosophy student to claim that ‘**the** dean of student affairs attended a gathering here’. Although, somewhat seasoned, the student is not acquainted with *c*, the dean of student affairs, as uniquely satisfying the predicate of the definite description. Neither are his jaded cohorts. Nonetheless, communication succeeds. In this discussion about the past, the student’s usage of the definite description conforms to Russell’s account.

Scanning the department some more, the student comes across an application for a humanities grant that has been placed upon a brand new backpack. Our seasoned philosophy student, cynical as ever, says that ‘**a** new philosophy student believes that philosophy students are awarded humanities grants’. His jaded cohorts have a good laugh at the new student’s expense. Obviously, communication is successful. And it succeeds despite the fact that neither the somewhat seasoned philosophy student nor his jaded cohorts are acquainted with *d*, the bright-eyed new philosophy student, as satisfying the predicate of the indefinite description. In this discussion regarding the present state of some poor soul’s mental life, the student’s usage of the indefinite description conforms to Russell’s account.

But do all uses of descriptions conform to Russell's account? Here, we confront Donnellan and his distinction. Donnellan (1966, 1968, 1978) distinguished between two distinct types of uses of definite descriptions: **attributive** uses and **referential** uses:<sup>1</sup>

A speaker who uses a definite description attributively in an assertion states something about whoever or whatever is the so-and-so. A speaker who uses a definite description referentially in an assertion, on the other hand, uses the description to enable his audience to pick out whom or what he is talking about and states something about that person or thing. (1966: 176).

For many theorists, the attributive use fits comfortably within Russell's account. When a speaker uses a definite description attributively, the description seems to function like a general term, presumably on par with the semantics laid down by Russell.<sup>2</sup> The referential use, however, goes unmentioned by Russell. When a speaker uses a definite description referentially, the description seems to function like a singular term; speakers use the description to 'get across' a singular proposition.

To illustrate Donnellan's distinction, let's consider a modified formulation of Donnellan's famous Smith's murderer case.<sup>3</sup> Mary and Sally stumble upon Smith's disfigured corpse. Smith, as is mutually known, was the friendliest person in all of Pleasantville. Accordingly, only an absolute madman would murder poor old Smith in this gruesome manner. Gazing upon the terrible scene, Sally tells Mary that:

1. The murderer is insane.

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<sup>1</sup> Recanati (1989b) traces the distinction to the Port-Royal grammarian, Antoine Arnauld. See Ostertag (1998) for details. Neale (1990) also provides a nice historical overview of the distinction.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout the chapter, I will talk of attributive and referential uses of descriptions. This manner of speech is simply short hand for talk about attributive and referential uses of description-tokens. No confusion should follow.

<sup>3</sup> Donnellan's famous example employs the possessive **DP** 'Smith's murderer'. Typically, possessive **DPs** are categorized as definite descriptions. In 1.1, we tentatively rejected that position. For present purposes, however, such a rejection will not hinder the main focus of our discussion, namely the referential use of **DP**'s exemplifying the form 'the F'.

In this context, Sally intends to get across a general proposition that whoever is the unique murderer is also insane. Sally's assertive grounds are not even partially determined by an investigation into the mental life of some particular individual like, say, Jones. Rather, the murder scene wholly furnishes her grounds. Her grounds, we might suppose, are quite general. For Donnellan, Sally's usage of the definite description in (1) is attributive. The definite description seems to function as a general term. Sally gets across a general proposition. The description could be felicitously qualified with 'whoever that is'. And, presumably, Russell's account of the general proposition rings true.

Now, let's switch contexts. Sally and Mary are at Jones's trial. Jones is accused of murdering Smith. Jones's frequent psychotic outbursts throughout the trial prompt Sally to whisper (1). For Donnellan, Sally's usage of the definite description is referential. Sally uses the definite description with the intention to refer to Jones and to say of him that he is insane. Here the definite description seems to function as a singular term. Sally gets across a proposition that is true *iff* Jones is insane.<sup>4</sup> In this context, Sally could not felicitously qualify her usage of 'the murderer' with 'whoever that is' and satisfy her communicative goal.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> On this gloss, the definite description's nominal does not contribute a property to what is conveyed. This, I take it, is the standard treatment of referential usage. One could, however, maintain that the nominal does contribute a property. Thus, one might maintain that Sally conveys a proposition that is true *iff* Jones is a murderer and Jones is insane. As we shall see in 3.3.5, this non-standard gloss opens up a novel explanation of the uneasy tension misdescription cases create.

<sup>5</sup> Wilson warns against taking this feature too seriously:

I can appropriately assert, while demonstrating a salient individual in front of me, 'That man, whoever he is, is a loud buffoon,' if I fail to possess whatever interest-relative identificatory information for which the situation and my audience call. Surely my appositive disclaimer does not make my use of the demonstrative 'nonreferential'. ...It would be a better test of attributive use to ask whether an utterance of 'The  $\phi$  is  $\psi$ ' can be paraphrased as 'Whatever is the  $\phi$  is  $\psi$ ', where 'whatever' is a quantifier or part of a quantifier phrase. (1991: 385, fn. 19).

To fully appreciate Donnellan's observation, we need to push matters further. Suppose that one and only one man murdered Smith, but it wasn't Jones; Bill did the deed. Sally **misd**scribes Jones. For Russellians, then, Jones's mental health is irrelevant to the truth-value of what Sally said. Russellians must maintain that what Sally said is true or false in virtue of how matters stand with Bill. If Bill is insane, then Sally has said something true; if Bill is not insane, then Sally has said something false. In this context, however, Russell's account seems to leave what Sally means unaccounted for. Suppose that Bill is convicted and Jones is vindicated. Suppose further that Jones overheard Sally's whisper. As Kripke (1979b) points out, if Jones decides to accuse Sally of libel, his failure to uniquely satisfy the definite description in (1) would not provide Sally with a convincing defense.

In the referential case, Sally intends to get across a singular proposition about Jones. She utilizes a definite description to get the job done. In the attributive case, she intends to get across a general proposition about whoever uniquely murdered Smith. She uses a definite description to get that job done. For Donnellan, a speaker can use a definite description to convey either a general or singular proposition.

Following Neale (1990), we can be more explicit about what constitutes the referential usage of definite descriptions. In particular, we can say that:

**(R<sub>1</sub>) Referential Use of Definite Descriptions.** S uses 'the F' referentially in an utterance of 'the F is G' iff there is some individual, *o*, such that S means by his utterance of 'the F is G' that *o* is the F and that *o* is G.<sup>6</sup>

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Devitt (1981b) also seems to prefer 'Whatever is the  $\phi$  is  $\psi$ ' paraphrases in the attributive case. Despite the warning, we shall continue to utilize Donnellan's appositive formulation. In order to avoid trouble, we shall abstract from the interest-relative identificatory information the situation or audience might demand.

<sup>6</sup> As Neale (1990: 109, fn. 31) notes, (R<sub>1</sub>) is subject to counterexamples. Nonetheless, as Neale also notes, such an explication is sufficient for pursuing the semantic import of Donnellan's distinction.

Take Sally again. Sally's use of 'the murderer' in (1) (i.e. 'the murderer is insane.') counts as referential since there is some individual, namely Jones, such that Sally means by (1) that Jones is the murderer and that Jones is insane.

Departing from Neale, we shall provide an addendum to 'S means that *o* is the F'. Specifically, we shall maintain that S means that '*o*' is 'the F' whenever *o* **prompts S** to use 'the F'. Intuitively, '*o*' **prompts S** only if a causal-perceptual link to *o* grounds S's usage of the phrase under discussion. So, Sally means that Jones is the murderer because her perception of Jones grounds her usage of 'the murderer' in (1). This, of course, is not to maintain that whenever S is causally-perceptually linked to '*o*', S cannot use 'the F' non-referentially. For S can be so linked to '*o*' without that link grounding his usage of the description in question.<sup>7</sup>

Although Donnellan (1966, 1968) did not discuss indefinite descriptions, it is easy to see how his discussion could encapsulate them.<sup>8</sup> Sally and Mary arrive at Sally's apartment. On the kitchen floor, they see some half-eaten pieces of cheese, several animal droppings, and a bit of shredded paper. On this evidence alone, Sally lets out (2) with a shriek:

2. A mouse is making a mess in my kitchen.

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<sup>7</sup> Devitt (1974, 1981a, 1981b, 2004, 2006a) places the referential use of definite descriptions within the causal theory of reference. This explication is a nod to that enterprise. Later, in 4.3.3, the formal details of this position are clarified and endorsed.

<sup>8</sup> Chastain (1975), Wilson (1978), and Evans (1982), Fodor and Sag (1982), and Ludlow and Neale (1991) provide cases of referential uses of indefinite descriptions. Donnellan (1978) discusses indefinite descriptions within the context of anaphoric chains. While discussing Chastain's work, Donnellan tells us that:

He [Chastain] thus holds that *a man* in the first sentence of the discourse fragment [A man came to the office today. He tried to sell me an encyclopedia.] would be a singular term with the same referent as the pronoun in the second. I am not wholly convinced of this. (1978: 57, fn. 6).

Donnellan believes that perhaps the speaker's use of the indefinite description raises a particular individual to salience enabling the speaker to refer to the individual with a pronoun.

Sally intends to get across a general proposition whose analysis Russell presumably gives. In this context, Sally uses the indefinite description attributively. She does not intend to assert of *a* that *a* is making a mess in her kitchen. Rather, she intends to get across the general proposition that there is at least one individual that is both a mouse and making a mess in her kitchen.

The situation, of course, could go differently. Sally walks into her kitchen. There she sees Charlie scurrying about on her kitchen floor. She sees the cheese, droppings, and shredded paper. Sally intends to get across that Charlie is making a mess on her kitchen floor. Accordingly, Sally utters (2). She uses the indefinite description referentially. Sally seems to get across a proposition that is true *iff* Charlie is making a mess in Sally's kitchen.

Once again, it will help to push things further. Sally **misdescribes** Charlie; he is actually a rat. He did, however, make the mess. The only remaining mouse in the universe, Jerry, was out of town when the deed was done. On Russell's account, Sally said something false; Jerry did not make the mess. Now surely Jerry wouldn't be emotionally wounded by Sally's accusations; they were aimed at a particular individual, Charlie. Once again, the Russellian account seemingly leaves what Sally meant unaccounted for.

Taking a page from Ludlow and Neale (1991), we can provide an explication of referential uses of indefinite descriptions parallel to the one given for definite descriptions. Specifically, we can hold that:

**(R<sub>2</sub>) Referential Use of Indefinite Descriptions.** **S** uses 'an F' referentially in an utterance of 'an F is G' *iff* there is some individual, *o*, such that **S** means by his utterance of 'an F is G' that *o* is an F and that *o* is G.

Accordingly, Sally uses ‘a mouse’ referentially in an her utterance of (2) (i.e. ‘A mouse is making a mess in my kitchen.’) since there is an individual, Charlie, such that Sally means by (2) that Charlie is a mouse and that Charlie is making a mess in Sally’s kitchen. As with referentially used definite descriptions, we shall insist that whether **S** means that *o* is an F depends, in part, on whether *o* prompts **S** to use the indefinite description.

So speakers can use indefinite and definite descriptions either attributively or referentially. On their attributive use, descriptions seemingly function like general terms. On their referential use, descriptions seemingly function like singular terms.

According to Donnellan, “as a theory of definite descriptions, Russell’s view seems to apply, if at all, to the attributive use only”. (1966: 183). Thus, Donnellan concluded, Russell’s account of definite descriptions was, at best, incomplete. The same conclusion apparently extends to Russell’s account of indefinite descriptions.

### *3.1.2 Donnellan’s Distinction and its Semantical Import*

What is one to make of Donnellan’s distinction? As we saw, Donnellan held that his distinction entailed that Russell’s account of definite descriptions was, at best, incomplete. Remember, one can use Russell’s insights in order to provide a univocal semantic account of the articles. His account postulates that the articles are simply quantifier determiners. Of course, if the articles are semantically ambiguous, then Russell’s account is, at best, incomplete. So, in order to demonstrate that Russell’s account is, at best, incomplete, one should demonstrate that the articles are semantically ambiguous. Accordingly, Donnellan’s distinction is problematic for Russell only if it has a unique semantical import; it is problematic only if it entails that the definite article is

ambiguous. Since he held that his distinction was problematic for Russell, one would think that Donnellan thought his distinction had entailed that the definite article is ambiguous. Donnellan (1966), however, was skeptical that his distinction was semantic:

In general, whether or not a definite description is used referentially or attributively is a function of the speaker's intention in a particular case. ...It does not appear plausible to account for this, either, as an ambiguity in the sentence. The grammatical structure of the sentence seems to me to be the same whether the description is used referentially or attributively. ...**Nor does it seem at all attractive to suppose an ambiguity in the meaning of the words; it does not appear to be semantically ambiguous.** (Perhaps we could say that the sentence [(1)] is pragmatically ambiguous: the distinction between the roles that the description plays is a function of the speaker's intentions.) These, of course, are intuitions; I do not have an argument for these conclusions. (1966: 186). (My emphasis).

Donnellan's own assessment is troubling.<sup>9</sup> As Kripke (1979b) correctly remarks, Donnellan's assessment is hard to square with the fact that Donnellan thought that his distinction was problematic for Russell's semantic proposal. Let's, then, set aside Donnellan's doubts. Inspired by Donnellan's observations, one could take his distinction to have semantical import. Specifically, one could conjecture that the ambiguity thesis best explains Donnellan's distinction:

**(AT) *The Ambiguity Thesis.*** 'A' and 'the' are semantically ambiguous; they have a quantificational and a referential meaning. On their quantificational reading, the articles denote quantificational binary functions and descriptions function as general terms. On their referential reading, the articles denote referential functions and descriptions function as singular terms.

Let's call the theorist that adopts **AT** an 'ambiguity theorist'.<sup>10</sup> The ambiguity theorist explains Donnellan's distinction **semantically**. Donnellan's distinction is a consequence

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<sup>9</sup> In his later writings, Donnellan continued to 'hedge'. See, for example, Donnellan (1978: 66 – 68).

<sup>10</sup> Proponents of **AT** include Partee (1972, 1986), Chastain (1975), Fodor and Sag (1982), Barwise and Perry (1983), Devitt and Sterelny (1997), and Devitt (2004, 2006a). Devitt (1974, 1981a, 1981b, 1997), Peacocke (1975), Hornsby (1977), Kaplan (1978a), Wettstein (1981, 1983), Wilson (1984, 1991), Schiffer (1995, 2005), and Reimer (1998a) hold only that the definite article is ambiguous between a quantificational and a referential meaning. Partee (1986) holds the further thesis that the articles have a

of the ambiguous nature of the articles. Since the articles are ambiguous between a quantificational and a referential meaning, speakers can use them to **express** general or singular propositions and thus to mean such propositions.

If **AT** is correct, then Russell's unitary account is surely incomplete. Although his account might capture the quantificational meaning of descriptions, Russell fails to account for their referential meaning. This failure might undermine Russell's account of the indefinite/definite contrast. If the articles have two distinct meanings, perhaps they contrast in two distinct ways. And if they contrast in two distinct ways, then Russell's unitary account of the contrast would be incomplete. Matters of real substance, then, rest upon the best account of Donnellan's distinction.

When confronted with Donnellan's distinction, some Russellians maintain the quantificational unitary thesis:

**(QT) *The Quantificational Unitary Thesis.*** 'A' and 'the' are not semantically ambiguous; they are purely quantificational in meaning. The articles solely denote quantificational binary functions and descriptions are univocally general terms.

Let's call these Russellians 'dedicated Russellians'.<sup>11</sup> Immediately, Donnellan's distinction forces the dedicated Russellian into a defensive posture. He must defend his

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third semantic function: predication. Fodor and Sag extend **AT** to numeral determiners as well as 'some', 'several', and 'many'.

<sup>11</sup> Grice (1969), Kripke (1972, 1973, 1979b), Sainsbury (1979), Searle (1979), Klein (1980), Davies (1981), Bach (1981, 1987, 2004, 2006a, 2006b), Evans (1982), Salmon (1982, 1991), Soames (1986, 1994), and Neale (1990, 2004, 2005b) adopt **QT** with respect to the definite article. Each theorist would presumably adopt the same position with respect to the indefinite article. Evans (1982), King (1988), and Ludlow and Neale (1991) do **explicitly** adopt **QT** with respect to the indefinite article. Kripke (1979b) and Grice (1981) are somewhat more cautious about the ultimate success of Russell's account. Recanati (1989b, 1993) and Bezuidenhout (1997) are special cases. Each theorist maintains that 'the' is univocal. Furthermore, both theorists propose a semantic analysis of the definite article that conforms to traditional Russellian strictures. But since they maintain that pragmatic principles can affect the proposition expressed, Recanati and Bezuidenhout hold that speakers can use definite descriptions to **express** singular propositions.

univocal semantics of the articles and his account of the indefinite/definite contrast. To do so, the dedicated Russellian must provide an explanation of the referential use of descriptions while staying loyal to **QT**. Furthermore, the dedicated Russellian must also provide principled reasons for preferring **QT** to all other competitors. The dedicated Russellian must demonstrate that his account best explains Donnellan's distinction. As we shall see, this task proves insurmountable.

### **3.2 Russellian Accounts of the Referential Use of Descriptions**

Traditionally, the dedicated Russellian has sought to explain the referential use of descriptions within the context of Grice's theory of conversational implicature. On this approach, the quantificational nature of the articles and the cooperative nature of conversation conspire to produce referential uses of descriptions. The referential use of descriptions, then, is an extra-semantic phenomenon; Donnellan's distinction is pragmatic. As such, its existence is not problematic for Russell's **semantic** account. Let's label this approach, the 'pragmatic approach'; we will call its proponents 'Russellian-Griceans'. More recently, some dedicated Russellians have sought to treat referential uses of descriptions as a special case of ellipsis. On this approach, (many) referential uses of descriptions are elliptical for fuller uses of general terms that contain singular terms. Here the referential use of descriptions has semantical import. Their semantical import, however, is unproblematic for Russell. The articles remain univocal quantifier determiners; descriptions remain wholly quantificational. Since its inspiration is rooted in Gödel's (1944) famous slingshot argument, we shall label this approach, the 'Gödelian approach'; we christen its advocates 'Russellian-Gödelians'. Following the

old dictate ‘age before beauty’, we begin with the pragmatic approach. The Gödelian approach will be tackled only afterwards.

### **3.3 The Pragmatic Approach**

As mentioned, the Russellian-Gricean formulates the pragmatic approach within Grice’s theory of conversational implicature. Thus, a proper understanding of the pragmatic approach requires familiarity with the main tenets of Grice’s theory. Our first goal, then, is to sketch his theory. Afterwards, we will discuss its application to referential uses of descriptions. Next, we shall look at some empirical and methodological arguments purporting to support the pragmatic approach. These arguments will be assessed and, eventually, rejected. Finally, we shall provide some arguments that undermine the pragmatic approach. Within **AT**, the conclusions of these arguments are entirely predictable. Thus, the collapse of the pragmatic approach provides a foundation for **AT**.

#### *3.3.1 Grice’s Theory of Conversational Implicature*

Within our framework, the proposition expressed by an utterance is equivalent to the truth-conditions of the utterance in its context. In this respect, the proposition expressed illuminates the semantic contribution of a particular expression within its language. Among other things, the semanticist is responsible for providing an adequate account of the proposition expressed by an utterance in a particular context. Russell’s account of the articles is part and parcel of this enterprise.

Now, speakers normally express propositions in order to contribute to conversations. As Grice (1989) observes, conversation is a cooperative activity:

Our talk exchanges do not normally consist of a succession of disconnected remarks, and would not be rational if they did. They are characteristically, to

some degree at least, cooperative efforts; and each participant recognizes in them, to some extent, a common purpose or set of purposes, or at least a mutually accepted direction. (1989: 26).

As a cooperative activity, conversation carries with it cooperative rules of engagement.

Conversational participants are expected, *ceteris paribus*, to abide by certain principles and rules of cooperative conduct. According to Grice, conversational participants abide by the Cooperative Principle (**CP**, hereafter)<sup>12</sup>:

**CP:** Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.

As it stands, **CP** specifies that a conversational participant make cooperative contributions. It does not, however, provide the requisite guidance for meeting that demand. **CP**'s four attending maxims provide this guidance:

**Quantity Maxim:** Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange). Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

**Quality Maxim:** Try to make your contribution one that is true, specifically do not say what you believe to be false and do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

**Relation Maxim:** Be relevant.

**Manner Maxim:** Be perspicuous, specifically avoid obscurity and ambiguity, and be brief and orderly.

The maxims prescribe that conversational contributions should be adequately informative, genuine, relevant, and perspicuous. Among other factors, **CP** and its attending maxims conspire to govern conversation.

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<sup>12</sup> For Grice this is an empirical fact. Nonetheless, it admits of a rationalist basis. See Grice (1989: 28 – 30).

By manipulating **CP** and its maxims, speakers can **convey** more than the propositions expressed by their utterances. They can **convey** conversational implicatures. Let's assume that **S**'s audience, **A**, correctly assumes that **S** is a cooperative conversational participant. Under this assumption, Grice holds that by expressing a proposition  $\lceil p \rceil$ , **S** conversationally implicates a proposition  $\lceil q \rceil$  *iff*:

- a. **S** thinks that  $q$  is required to make **S**'s conversational contribution consistent with the assumption that **S** is cooperative, and
- b. **S** thinks (and assumes that **A** thinks that **S** thinks) that **A** can work out, or grasp intuitively, that  $q$  is required to maintain **S**'s assumed cooperativeness.

Conversational implicatures, then, are those propositions required to maintain the assumed cooperative nature of a conversational participant's contribution.

Conversational implicatures are parasitic on the propositions that assertoric utterances of complete sentence-tokens express. If no proposition is expressed, no conversational implicature can be generated.<sup>13</sup> When the proposition expressed by an utterance helps generate a conversational implicature, we shall say that the speaker **communicates** the conversational implicature. Accordingly, **S conveys** those propositions his utterance expresses and communicates.

Let's illustrate. Mary asks Sally whether John likes his new job at the local bank. Sally tells Mary that John is being well compensated, that he likes his co-workers, and that his commute is less stressful than in the past. Sally completes her assessment by remarking that:

1. He hasn't gone to prison yet.

In this context, Sally expresses:

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<sup>13</sup> Our investigation is limited to assertoric speech acts. As such, it is proper to ignore those aspects of Grice's theory that go beyond this rather restrictive domain.

2. <<<John, Prison>, Gone> NEG>.

But she also conveys something more. Sally's utterance generates the conversational implicature:

3. <John, Questionable-character>.

This proposition is required to sustain the cooperative nature of Sally's conversational contribution. In the context at hand, Mary correctly assumes that Sally is a cooperative conversational participant. At a superficial level, however, Sally's utterance fails to express an adequately relevant proposition. Nonetheless:

- a. Sally thinks that (3) is required to make her conversational contribution consistent with the assumption that she is cooperative, and
- b. Sally thinks (and assumes that Mary thinks that Sally thinks) that Mary can work out, or grasp intuitively, that (3) is required to maintain Sally's assumed adherence to the relation maxim.

Accordingly, Sally conversationally implicates (3). So, Sally expresses that John hasn't been to prison yet; she communicates that John is of questionable character.

Contained within the definition of a conversational implicature is the idea that an audience can 'work out' or 'intuitively grasp' a conversational implicature. To work out a conversational implicature  $\lceil q \rceil$ , **A** must provide a derivation of  $\lceil q \rceil$  from the proposition expressed. The derivation usually runs like so:

- a. **S** has expressed the proposition that  $p$ .
- b. There is no reason to suppose that **S** is not observing the maxims or at least **CP**.
- c. **S** could not be following **CP** or its maxims unless **S** thought that  $q$ .
- d. **S** knows (and knows that **A** knows) that **A** can see that the supposition that **S** thinks that  $q$  is required.
- e. **S** has done nothing to stop **A** from thinking that  $q$ .
- f. **S** intends **A** to think, or is at least willing to allow **A** to think, that  $q$ .
- g. So, **S** has implicated that  $q$ .

Let's maintain that **A** intuitively grasps  $\lceil q \rceil$  iff **A** comes to entertain  $q$  without working it out. Now, although Grice holds that **A** can intuitively grasp conversational implicatures, a proposition  $\lceil q \rceil$  will count as a conversational implicature only if **A** can, in principle, provide a derivation of  $\lceil q \rceil$  from the proposition expressed. In this manner, derivability is a necessary condition for generating conversational implicatures.<sup>14</sup> Derivability, however, does not reach the level of a sufficient condition. Those conveyances that once began their livelihood as conversational implicatures can retire as conventional meanings.<sup>15</sup> In such cases, it might still be possible to provide a derivation of the conventional meaning from another proposition.<sup>16</sup> But this won't affect its semantical status.

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<sup>14</sup> Grice emphasizes this point on numerous occasions. Here is a sampling:

The presence of a conversational implicature must be capable of being worked out; for even if it can in fact be intuitively grasped, unless the intuition is replaceable by an argument, the implicature (if present at all) will not count as a conversational implicature; it will be a conventional implicature. (1989: 31).

But I would say that any such case [of a conversational implicature] would at least have to be supported by a demonstration of the way in which what is putatively implicated could have come to be implicated (by a derivation of it from conversational principles and other data). (1989: 43).

The final test for the presence of a conversational implicature had to be, as far as I could see, a derivation of it. One has to produce an account of how it could have arisen and why it is there. (1981: 187).

<sup>15</sup> Grice explains that:

It may not be impossible for what starts life, so to speak, as a conversational implicature to become conventionalized. (1989: 39).

And even [derivability] may not be sufficient to provide a decisive distinction between conversational implicature and a case in which what was originally a conversational implicature has become conventionalized. (1989: 43).

Kripke is also perceptive of this fact:

I find it plausible that a diachronic account of the evolution of language is likely to suggest that what was originally a mere speaker's reference may, if it becomes habitual in a community, evolve into a semantic reference. (1979b: 249).

<sup>16</sup> Freshly deceased metaphors are the paradigm case. See Saddock (1978), Levinson (1984), Devitt (1997, 2004), and Reimer (1998a). Crucially, the argument from convention depends upon the conventional status of dead metaphors. For discussion, see 3.3.6.3.

Besides being derivable, conversational implicatures are also, generally speaking, cancelable and nondetachable.<sup>17</sup> A conversational implicature, unlike the proposition expressed, can be canceled without outright contradiction or linguistic infelicity. A speaker can cancel an implicature either ‘explicitly’ or ‘contextually’. Adopting the former approach, the speaker explicitly states that he is not being cooperative; adopting the latter, the speaker produces an additional utterance that implies as much. In practice, most cancellations are contextual. Take Sally again. Typically, Sally would seek to cancel (3) by continuing: ‘and he will never go; he’s much too virtuous to commit any crime’. Furthermore, a speaker cannot usually find a distinct way to express the same proposition without generating the same conversational implicature. In this sense, conversational implicatures are usually not detachable from the utterances that generate them. In the context at hand, substituting ‘jail’, ‘big-house’, or ‘the pen’, for ‘prison’ will not detach (3) from an utterance of (1). Thus, (3) is nondetachable from (1).

Although neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for the presence of a conversational implicature, these features provide a rough and ready test for distinguishing the proposition expressed from the proposition communicated.<sup>18</sup> If a conveyance is cancelable or nondetachable, then it is not unreasonable to maintain that the conveyance is a conversational implicature. If the conveyance is both cancelable and

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<sup>17</sup> Conversational implicatures are also, generally speaking, reinforceable and indeterminate. A conversational implicature is reinforceable in the sense that one can explicitly assert the proposition communicated without any infelicitous redundancy. For example, Sally could continue her assessment by saying, ‘John is of questionable character’, without any hint of redundancy. As Saddock (1978) observes, reinforceable and cancellation are intimately linked. A conversational implicature is indeterminate insofar as an audience might legitimately derive any number of propositions from the proposition expressed which the speaker would not deny as having intended to convey.

<sup>18</sup> Saddock (1978) demonstrated that being cancelable or nondetachable are neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for the presence of a conversational implicature.

nondetachable, then labeling the conveyance a conversational implicature becomes even more warranted. The presence of a derivation only strengthens the case.

For Grice, certain phrases normally carry conversational implicatures, while others do not. Grice labels the former ‘generalized conversational implicatures’ (GCIs, hereafter); the latter he labels ‘particularized conversational implicatures’ (PCIs, hereafter).<sup>19</sup> In a more formal vein, Levinson (2000) provides this characterization:

**PCI:** An implicature  $\lceil i \rceil$  from an utterance  $\lceil U \rceil$  is particularized *iff*  $U$  implicates  $i$  only by virtue of specific contextual circumstances that would not invariably or even normally obtain.

**GCI:** An implicature  $\lceil i \rceil$  from an utterance  $\lceil U \rceil$  is generalized *iff*  $U$  implicates  $i$  **unless** there are unusual specific contextual circumstances that cancel it.<sup>20</sup>

With the former, contextual circumstances are largely responsible for generating the implicature; with the latter, they are largely responsible for its demise.

On this characterization, (3) is a PCI. An utterance of (1) does not invariably or even normally conversationally implicate (3). Suppose that whenever John gets extremely frustrated with his job, he gets drunk and picks a fight with the local sheriff. The end result: John spends the night in the drunk-tank. Here, an utterance of (1) fails to generate (3). Or, suppose that John is a civil rights activist engaging in civil disobedience. Suppose further that Sally and Mary mutually acknowledge that John’s activism is quite noble. In this context, an utterance of (1) would not generate (3). Take a more mundane case. John is a court appointed defense attorney. Thus, he spends significant proportions of his day at prison. Here, an utterance of (1) would also fail to generate (3). Sally’s

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<sup>19</sup> See Grice (1981: 185 – 187) and Grice (1989: 37 – 40).

<sup>20</sup> Levinson uses the term ‘defeat’. For consistency’s sake, I have chosen to stick with the term ‘cancel’.

utterance of (1) generates (3) only in virtue of the specific contextual circumstances at hand.

Conversation is rich with uncontroversial cases of PCIs. Uncontroversial cases of GCIs, on the other hand, are sparse. On the assumption that the usage of a certain phrase normally purports to generate a conversational implicature, often times a theorist might treat the purported conversational implicature as part of the semantic content of the phrase, while another theorist might treat the purported conversational implicature as a GCI. Naturally, controversy arises. Nonetheless, there is at least one uncontroversial case we can focus on: ‘some’.<sup>21</sup> As such, we shall take the purported GCI that uses of ‘some’ generate as the paradigmatic case of an actual GCI.

Sally held an informal gathering Friday night. Mary could not attend; she came down with a cold Friday morning. On Monday, Mary calls Sally. She wants details. The gathering was a terrible mess, Mary explains. The guests got drunk and disorderly. Furniture got damaged, china broken, and carpets ruined. With a sigh, Sally continues:

4. Some CDs were stolen.

As a cooperative speaker, Sally’s contribution ought to be adequately informative. If her contribution weren’t adequately informative, she would violate the quantity maxim and, thereby, be uncooperative. Now, a universal claim is more informative than a mere existential claim. Sally’s contribution, then, is adequately informative *iff* she believes:

5.  $\sim$  [Every  $x$ : CD  $x$ ] (broken  $x$ ).

Accordingly,

- a. Sally thinks that her belief that (5) is required to make her conversational contribution consistent with the assumption that she is cooperative, and

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<sup>21</sup> Most theorists take ‘and’ as a second case. This is a serious mistake. See 3.3.6.3, fn. 73 for details.

- b. Sally thinks (and assumes that Mary thinks that Sally thinks) that Mary can work out, or grasp intuitively, that Sally's belief that (5) is required to maintain Sally's assumed adherence to the quantity maxim.

In this manner, Sally's utterance conversationally implicates that she believes (5). This implicature constitutes a GCI. Utterances exemplifying the form 'some Fs are Gs' conversationally implicate propositions of the form 'S believes that  $\sim$  [Every  $x$ : Fx] (Gx)' unless cancelled, either explicitly or contextually.<sup>22</sup> In such cases, it is simply not enough to modify the initial contextual circumstances. Rather, S must 'opt out' of CP and its maxims or amend his initial utterance with a cancellation like 'In fact, every F is G'. This is most markedly different from standard PCI cases.

For Grice, GCIs have deep philosophical significance. Prior to Grice work, some philosophers of logic regarded the equivalence of the logical operators composing first-order logic with their natural language 'analogs' as a terrible mistake.<sup>23</sup> To these philosophers, the logical operators and their analogs appeared systematically divergent. With his notion of GCI, Grice moved to undermine this position. All supposed divergences, Grice argued, reduce to the GCIs attaching to the usage of the natural language analogs in ordinary conversation. The divergences, Grice maintained, were extra-semantic facts. Those who characterized the divergences as semantic failed to pay adequate attention to the cooperative constraints imposed upon conversation. Specifically, these philosophers mistook the GCI of a certain analog as its semantic

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<sup>22</sup> We can now formulate the notion of a Horn scale within a more natural framework. Let ' $x$ ' and ' $y$ ' compose ' $\langle x, y \rangle$ '. Here, ' $p$ ' represents an open sentence. Let ' $p_n$ ' stand for ' $p$ ' closed by ' $n$ '. Now, ' $\langle x, y \rangle$ ' is a Horn scale *iff* S's use of a token of  $p_y$  generates a quantity GCI that S believes that  $\sim p_x$ .

<sup>23</sup> Strawson (1952) is a paradigm case.

content. This mistake led to faulty semantic accounts and, finally, to the mistaken view that the logical operators and their analogs had divergent meanings.<sup>24</sup>

Some Russellians attempt to follow Grice's bold path. Remember, the Russellian maintains that 'a' and 'the' are the natural language analogs of '∃' and 'ι'. The referential use of descriptions presents one with an apparent divergence. Adopting Grice's strategy, the Russellian-Gricean seeks to explain this apparent divergence in terms of purported GCIs attaching to the usage of the articles. We now turn to this strategy.

### *3.3.2 Referential Uses as Generalized Conversational Implicatures*

The Russellian holds that descriptions are univocally general terms. Accordingly, the Russellian maintains that **all** utterances of sentence-tokens containing descriptions express those general propositions Russell's analysis predicts. Referential uses of descriptions are no exception; utterances of sentence-tokens containing such uses express general propositions. Besides holding this view, the Russellian-Gricean maintains that an utterance of a sentence-token containing a referential use of a description communicates a singular proposition. Specifically, the Russellian-Gricean claims that an utterance of the sentence-token generates a GCI. The GCI is a singular proposition that contains **S**'s intended target as a logical subject.<sup>25</sup> Referential uses of descriptions, then, do not have semantical import. Donnellan's distinction is a chapter of pragmatics. In the end, Donnellan's distinction is of little concern to the semanticist. Here's Neale:

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<sup>24</sup> See Grice (1989: 22 – 24).

<sup>25</sup> Grice (1969), Kripke (1979b), Klein (1980), Bach (1987, 2004) and Neale (1990) seem to provide such an analysis of the referential use of definite descriptions. Ludlow and Neale (1991) endorse this style of explanation for indefinite descriptions. Here, we sketch Klein and Neale's accounts.

In short, then, the Russellian-Gricean sees referential usage as an important fact about **communication** to be explained by general pragmatic principles not something of **semantical** import. (1990: 85). (His emphasis).

The best glimpse of the pragmatic approach comes from considering referential uses of definite descriptions. Using the ‘the murderer’ referentially, Sally utters ‘the murderer is insane’. Sally, remember, means to refer to Jones as the murderer and to say of him that he is insane. In the conversational context, Sally achieves this goal. At the very least, then, Sally **conveys** a proposition containing Jones as a constituent. For the Russellian, Sally’s utterance expresses something like:

6. [The  $x$ : murderer  $x$ ] (insane  $x$ ).

This is a general proposition. So, the definite article denotes the DEF. function; the definite description behaves as a general term. Sally, then, does not satisfy her communicative intentions by **expressing** a singular proposition. Rather, she does so by **communicating** a singular proposition.

As a cooperative speaker, the Russellian-Gricean reminds us, Sally’s utterance ought to be adequately genuine and adequately relevant. If her contribution were neither adequately genuine nor adequately relevant, Sally would violate the quality and relation maxims and, thereby, be uncooperative. Sally and Mary are mutually aware of Jones’s frequent psychotic outbursts; each thinks that Jones is surely guilty. In this context, the general proposition expressed by Sally’s utterance is not as relevant as the singular proposition that Jones is insane.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, Sally’s grounds for her assertion are almost wholly anchored in Jones’s psychotic behavior. Sally’s utterance, then, is adequately genuine and adequately relevant *iff* Sally believes that:

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<sup>26</sup> See Recanati (1989b, 1993).

## 7. &lt;Jones, Insane&gt;.

Mary correctly assumes that Sally is a paradigm of cooperation. Thus, Mary thinks that:

- a. Sally thinks that (7) is required to make her conversational contribution consistent with the assumption that she is cooperative, and
- b. Sally thinks (and assumes that I think that Sally thinks) that I can work out, or grasp intuitively, that (7) is required to maintain Sally's assumed adherence to the relation maxim and the quality maxim.

Presumably, Mary intuitively grasps (7). The Russellian-Gricean, however, is not wedded to this presumption. Using the general proposition expressed, the conversational context, Sally and Mary's shared background assumptions, and **CP** and its attending maxims, Klein (1980), Recanati (1989b, 1993), and Neale (1990) show how Mary could derive (7) from (6).<sup>27</sup>

Sally's utterance, then, generates (7) as a conversational implicature. Sally's conversational contribution is cooperative only upon the assumption that she believes (7). Furthermore, Mary could derive (7) from, among other things, (6). Sally satisfies her

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<sup>27</sup> According to Neale, Mary could derive the implicature by reasoning like so:

- (a) Sally has expressed (6).
- (b) There is no reason to suppose that Sally is not observing **CP** and its attending maxims.
- (c) Sally could not be doing so unless she thought that (7). On the assumption that Sally is observing the relation maxim, she must be attempting to convey something over and above the general proposition that whoever is uniquely a murderer is insane. On the assumption that Sally is adhering to the quality maxim, she must have adequate evidence for thinking that (6). It is not plausible to suppose that she has just general grounds for this belief; therefore she must have some singular grounds. I can see that there is someone in the perceptual environment, namely Jones, who could be taken to satisfy the description 'the murderer', and I can see that Sally can see this. Therefore the grounds for Sally's assertion that the murderer is insane are plausibly furnished by the belief that (7).
- (d) Sally believes (and knows that I know that she believes) that I believe that Jones is the murderer, that I know that Sally believes that Jones is the murderer, and that I can see that Sally thinks that the supposition that she thinks that (7) is required.
- (e) Sally has done nothing to stop me from thinking that (7).
- (f) Sally intends me to think, or is at least willing to allow me to think that (7).
- (g) So, Sally has implicated (7).

Obviously, some other derivation will be necessary in cases where both the speaker and the hearer mutually believe that the object the speaker has in mind fails to fit the description. Donnellan's (1966) king/usurper case springs to mind. Neale (1990: 112, fn. 40) provides some useful suggestions for how the Russellian-Gricean can handle such cases. Klein (1980: 84 – 87) proposes a derivation that only invokes the quality maxim.

communicative intention pragmatically; she expresses a general proposition in order to communicate a singular one. The referential usage of definite descriptions lacks semantical import; within **QT**, we arrive at a perfectly plausible explanation of it.

The pragmatic approach extends to referential uses of indefinite descriptions. The Russellian claims that referential uses of indefinite descriptions express general propositions. The Russellian-Gricean can claim that such usage generates singular propositions as conversational implicatures. Referential uses of indefinite descriptions, then, lack semantical import. They too fall squarely within pragmatics.

The Russellian-Gricean categorizes such implicatures as GCIs.<sup>28</sup> Since speakers will usually have some singular ground for an assertive utterance of sentence-tokens exemplifying 'The F is G' or 'An F is G', they will implicate, relatively independent of context, that they believe that the description's denotation is 'G'. More generally, the Russellian-Gricean maintains that an utterance of a sentence-token containing a description normally generates a singular proposition containing S's intended target as a conversational implicature. As demonstrated above, the GCIs are derivable. They are also cancelable. According to Klein, 'whoever that is' provides a contextual cancellation of the GCI arising from the referential use of a definite description. We can view 'but I'm not sure which one' as playing the same role with respect to indefinite descriptions. Klein maintains that speakers can also explicitly cancel the GCIs by transparently opting-out of **CP** and its maxims. Furthermore, the implicatures are nondetachable. As Kripke (1979b) demonstrated, a speaker's ability to successfully produce referential uses of descriptions would not be thwarted even if English were a 'strong' Russell language,

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<sup>28</sup> See Klein (1980: 84 – 89), Neale (1990: 88), and Bach (2004) for a discussion pertaining to the referential use of definite descriptions.

even if usage of the articles were explicitly banned and their Russellian paraphrases were used instead.<sup>29</sup>

Adopting the pragmatic approach, the Russellian can provide an account of referential uses of descriptions while maintaining that descriptions are univocally general terms. Referential uses of descriptions are a product of the univocal semantics of the articles and the cooperative nature of conversation. The ambiguity theorist, of course, can also provide an account of referential usage. For the ambiguity theorist, the referential use of descriptions is simply a reflection of the referential semantics of the articles. In order to convince the uninitiated to adopt his approach, the Russellian should demonstrate that his approach provides a better explanation of referential usage than his opponent. The Russellian-Gricean attempts to do so on both methodological and empirical grounds.

### *3.3.3 The Pragmatic Approach and Methodology*

The Russellian-Gricean maintains that, from a methodological perspective, the pragmatic approach is preferable to **AT**. His strongest case is cast in terms of theoretical simplicity.<sup>30</sup> According to the Russellian-Gricean, the pragmatic approach provides a

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<sup>29</sup> It is not clear whether the 'GCIs' are also reinforceable. It might seem somewhat redundant for Sally to continue by saying 'Jones is insane'. The GCIs are certainly not indeterminate.

<sup>30</sup> Kripke (1979b) provides four methodological arguments in favor of a unitary Russellian analysis of the definite article. Two arguments do not stand up to immediate scrutiny. First, Kripke maintains that if the definite article were ambiguous in English, then one would, at the very least, expect that the definite article would be disambiguated in some foreign language. But, Kripke cautiously claims, no one expects to find such a language. Such languages, however, have been found. Here's Larson and Segal:

The idea that English contains a definite determiner that is ambiguous in just this way is plausible on a number of grounds. For one thing, there are languages that seem to display the same ambiguity directly. Examples are German, Modern Greek, and spoken colloquial Spanish. (1995: 334).

Second, Kripke maintains that the resemblance between referential definite descriptions and misapplied names is so close that any divergent explanation between the two is 'automatically suspect'. Since the only available explanation for names is pragmatic, the same must follow for definite descriptions. Devitt (1981b) and Salmon (2004) have demonstrated that the cases are indeed distinct. Thus, treating them

simpler account of referential usage than **AT**. On the assumption that both accounts are explanatorily equivalent, the theoretically simpler account is preferable. From a methodological perspective, then, **QT** is preferable to **AT**. In a nutshell, this is the ‘argument from simplicity’. Here is the expanded edition.

The argument from simplicity begins with an interesting observation. Donnellan’s distinction does not extend to descriptions exclusively. Rather, Donnellan’s distinction encompasses uncontroversial quantifier phrases as well.<sup>31</sup> Take ‘most’. In English, ‘most’ denotes the **MOST** function:

$$(\odot 4). \text{ ‘}f_{\langle F, G \rangle}\text{’ is true iff } |F \cap G| > |F - G|.$$

Accordingly, the **DP** ‘most philosophers’ is a quantifier phrase.

As Davies (1981) demonstrates, the **DP**’s status as a general term does not preclude speakers from using it referentially. Sally and Mary are at a party. It is mutually known that there are five philosophers in the room. Two of these philosophers are arch-criminals; two other philosophers are upstanding members of the community. The legal standing of the fifth philosopher, Brown, is the topic of much gossip. In this context, Sally conveys that Brown is a criminal by uttering:

8. Most philosophers are criminals.

Sally uses the quantifier phrase referentially; she uses it to refer to Brown and say of him that he is a criminal. Here, the uncontroversial quantifier phrase seemingly functions like a singular term. Speakers, then, can use **DPs** exemplifying the form ‘most Fs’ referentially and attributively.

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distinctly is not ‘automatically suspect’; it is respectable methodology. Kripke’s other arguments hinge on theoretical simplicity. We now return to that theme.

<sup>31</sup> See Neale (1990: 87 – 89) and Larson and Segal (1995: 342 – 344) for a class of cases.

Of course, it is simply absurd to postulate that ‘most’ is ambiguous between a referential and quantificational meaning.<sup>32</sup> Rather, the referential use of the **DP** is a product of the quantificational meaning of ‘most’ and the cooperative nature of conversation. In this case, referential usage is obviously a wholly pragmatic affair. Sally’s utterance expresses:

9. [Most  $x$ : philosopher  $x$ ] (criminals  $x$ ).

By manipulating shared background information as well as **CP** and its maxims, Sally conversationally implicates:

10. <Brown, Criminal>.

Sally’s utterance **expresses** a general proposition. Through referential usage, however, she **communicates** a singular proposition.

The moral of the story is instructive. The pragmatic approach is necessary independent of the conflict between the dedicated Russellian and the ambiguity theorist.

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<sup>32</sup> For Evans, this absurdity extended to the indefinite article:

An alternative position would be to maintain that descriptions are unambiguous (always quantifiers), and to explain the fact that speakers often intend information-invoking identification on the part of the audience as the result of the operation of standard conversational factors. (After all, one might intend information-invoking identification with a sentence like ‘Under that tree stands an honest man’, but this would not lead one to postulate an ambiguity in the expression ‘a man’, claiming that it has a referential, as well as a quantificational use). (1982: 321).

In a similar vein, Wilson tells us that:

Being characteristically used for purposes of referential identification cannot possibly be either a sufficient or a necessary condition for being a singular term. It cannot be a sufficient condition because this would make indefinite descriptions count as singular terms. ... Indefinite descriptions **are** ... essentially predicative and so, however the category is ultimately defined, not to be treated as singular terms. (1978: 72 – 73). (His emphasis).

In light of Wilson’s assessment, it is interesting to discover that Neale (1990) and Ludlow and Neale (1991) claim Wilson holds that the indefinite article is ambiguous between a quantificational and referential meaning. It is even more interesting since Wilson explicitly attempts to **replace** Russell’s univocal quantificational semantics with a univocal predicational semantics. King’s explication of Wilson seems more accurate:

Some philosophers and linguists have developed views which are incompatible with both UT [the view that the indefinite article always serves to assert an existential generalization] and AT [the view that the indefinite article sometimes serves to assert an existential generalization and sometimes to perform some other function]. See, for example, George Wilson’s ‘On Definite and Indefinite Descriptions’. (1988: 438 – 439, fn. 2).

For example, a proper treatment of the referential usage of uncontroversial quantifier phrases demands a pragmatic approach. Now, the ambiguity theorist holds that, on their attributive reading, descriptions are quantifier phrases. So, the ambiguity theorist, like the Russellian-Gricean, has all the resources to explain the referential use of descriptions without actually postulating an ambiguity. The referential meaning of the articles appears to be superfluous. And, yet, the ambiguity theorist postulates it anyway. The ambiguity theorist, in so doing, runs afoul of Grice's (1989) razor: **Don't multiply senses beyond necessity**. Since the referential meaning of the articles is not explanatorily necessary, it is an idle wheel. As such, sound methodology requires its rejection. Once purged of its referential commitments, **AT** is indistinguishable from its theoretically simpler rival: **QT**. For simplicities sake, then, one ought to adopt **QT**.

As a corollary to the argument from simplicity, we arrive at the 'argument from uniformity'. Referential usage of quantifier phrases is a rather general phenomenon in English. From a methodological perspective, uniform treatments of general phenomenon are, *ceteris paribus*, preferable to non-uniform treatments. Now, as we saw, a pragmatic approach is an antecedent necessity; one must adopt it to account for the referential usage of **DPs** like 'most philosophers'. The ambiguity theorist and the dedicated Russellian each admit that descriptions are, on at least one reading, quantifier phrases. Furthermore, each party accepts that quantifier phrases, generally speaking, have referential uses. For his part, the Russellian-Gricean seems to provide a uniform pragmatic account of the referential use of quantifier phrases. The ambiguity theorist, however, must treat descriptions in a *sui generis* manner. For the ambiguity theorist, referential usage of descriptions is handled semantically, while the referential usage of all other quantifier

phrases is handled pragmatically. On this account, it seems that either speakers cannot or do not use quantificational descriptions referentially or that such usage is distinct from the referential usage that is grounded in the referential meaning of the articles. This position, however, unnecessarily segregates quantificational descriptions from their brethren.<sup>33</sup> As such, Russell's uniform and univocal account is, *ceteris paribus*, methodologically preferable to the ambiguity theorist's heterogeneous and equivocal approach.<sup>34</sup>

### 3.3.4 The Pragmatic Approach and Evidence

On methodological grounds alone, then, **QT** seems to trump **AT**. The Russellian-Gricean's account is theoretically simpler and homogeneous. The Russellian-Gricean, however, is not content with mere methodological superiority. He also seeks explanatory superiority. To demonstrate the pragmatic approach's explanatory superiority, the Russellian-Gricean focuses his attention upon misdescription cases. Let's call the following argument the 'argument from misdescription'.

Jones, remember, is innocent but insane. Bill, on the other hand, is guilty but sane. The definite description 'the murderer', then, misdescribes Jones; it does, however, correctly describe Bill. When **S** uses 'the murderer' referentially to refer to Jones, the ambiguity theorist typically holds that an assertive utterance of 'the murderer is insane' conveys one proposition; it **expresses** the true singular proposition that Jones is insane.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> See Davies (1981: 158).

<sup>34</sup> I think Neale might have had something similar in mind when he claimed that:  
The phenomenon [of referential usage] is not even specific to definite descriptions, it arises with quantifiers quite generally. (1990: 90).

<sup>35</sup> The ambiguity theorist could, of course, hold that the description's nominal contributes a property to the proposition expressed. In that case, the utterance would express a false singular proposition.

The ambiguity theorist, then, typically holds that **S** can misdescribe his subject and, nonetheless, express nothing false. The same analysis, of course, holds in our misdescription case involving ‘a mouse’. This position, however, appears to be counterintuitive.<sup>36</sup> Following Davies (1981), Neale tells us that:

We want to say that **S** did something right but **also** that **S** did something **wrong**. After all, the description he used **failed to fit** the person **S** wanted to ‘talk about,’ and to that extent the speech act was defective. (1990: 91). (His emphasis).

According to the Russellian-Gricean, the ambiguity theorist fails to account for this ‘uneasy tension’. Allegedly, the ambiguity theorist does not have a positive account of misdescription cases.

On the pragmatic approach, however, the uneasy tension admits of an explanation. Sally conveys two propositions. She expresses a general proposition and communicates a singular proposition. In the above case, the general proposition is false, while the singular proposition is true. So Sally manages to convey something true and false at the same time. The Russellian-Gricean explains the uneasy tension in terms of the divergence in truth-values between the proposition expressed and the proposition communicated. Sally did something right; she conveyed that Jones is insane. But she also did something wrong; she conveyed that there is exactly one murderer and all murderers are insane.

The pragmatic approach, then, seems to be explanatorily superior to **AT**. On the surface, the pragmatic approach seems to account for all the data that **AT** accounts for.

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<sup>36</sup> Davies remarks that:

By [the ambiguity theorist’s] account, the speaker comes out with ‘Smith’s murderer is insane’ believing falsely that Jones murdered Smith, Smith’s actual murderer is not insane, and yet the speaker says nothing false. It is this position, rather than the Russellian theorist’s position, which is counterintuitive. (1981: 159 – 60).

But, unlike his rival, the Russellian-Gricean can provide a positive account of the uneasy tension misdescription cases produce. Thus, the pragmatic approach incorporates **and** exceeds its rival. On the basis of this fact alone, the uninitiated ought to adopt the pragmatic approach over **AT**. The methodological benefits the pragmatic approach provides further strengthens its appeal. Russell's univocal account seems to survive the challenge Donnellan's distinction poses.

### 3.3.5 *Assessing the Arguments*

The Russellian-Gricean has provided three arguments in favor of the pragmatic approach: the argument from simplicity, the argument from uniformity, and the argument from misdescription. At first blush, these arguments appear convincing. Upon further inspection, however, one discovers that the arguments are plagued with difficulties. The difficulties, in turn, undermine the arguments' justificatory stature. As a consequence, the pragmatic approach loses its initial appeal.

Let's begin at the end. According to the Russellian-Gricean, the ambiguity theorist, unlike his rival, cannot account for the uneasy tension misdescription cases produce. Consequently, the pragmatic approach has an empirical edge over its opponent. This, remember, is the argument from misdescription. Against the Russellian-Gricean, we wish to maintain that the ambiguity theorist can account for misdescription cases.

To adequately motivate the account, we borrow a page from the Russellian-Gricean's playbook. 'Misdescription' cases involving singular terms are easy to construct. Consider complex demonstratives.<sup>37</sup> Bored with the articles, Sally makes use of the

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<sup>37</sup> Lepore and Ludwig (2000) (**L&L**, hereafter) and Neale (1993c, 2002, 2004) think otherwise. **L&L** hold that utterances of sentences-tokens exemplifying 'That F is G' expresses:

(i). ' [The  $x$ :  $Fx$  &  $x = that$ ] (Gx) '.

complex demonstrative ‘that murderer’ to refer to Jones. Jones, of course, is no murderer. Thus, Sally does something right and something wrong. We, once again, feel an uneasy tension. In this case, however, the familiar pragmatic story is not available; the usage of complex demonstratives does not generate a general proposition as a GCI. Some other account, then, must be sought to explain the uneasy tension in these **misdemonstration** cases.<sup>38</sup> The ambiguity theorist can utilize that account to handle misdescription cases.

Generally speaking, the use of a complex demonstrative is grounded in a casual/perceptual link to an individual. In misdemonstration cases, the individual in question does not have the property the nominal denotes. This fact causes our uneasy tension. **A** expects the complex demonstrative to fit the individual that prompts its

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In (i), ‘*that*’ represents the individual **S**’s use of ‘that’ refers to. **L&L** adopt this view mainly to handle complex demonstratives that are quantified into:

(ii). [John]<sup>1</sup>/[Every boy]<sup>1</sup> hates [that class [he]<sub>1</sub> fails]<sup>2</sup>.

Only a description-based approach to complex demonstratives, so **L&L** claim, can properly account for these uses. I’m rather skeptical of this view. First, ‘quantified into’ uses of complex demonstratives are marginal and rather forced (I usually find myself unconsciously replacing ‘that’ with a **quantificational** ‘the’). As such, one should be cautious about building any case upon them, especially such a controversial one. After all, one can, on occasion, quantify into predicative uses of complex demonstratives. Observe:

(iii). [John]<sup>1</sup>/[Every boy]<sup>1</sup> wants to be [that teacher [he]<sub>1</sub> admires]<sup>2</sup>.

But, I suppose, one would not thereby infer that complex demonstratives are univocally predicates.

Second, **L&L**’s account actually fails to handle some uses of (ii). **S** can use (ii) to convey a wholly general proposition, namely:

(iv). [Every *x*: boy *x*] ([The *y*: class *y* & fails *x*, *y*] (hates *x*, *y*)).

Here, ‘that’ does not provide an individual to the proposition expressed. So, **L&L**’s proposal fails. **L&L** maintain that they are not concerned with such uses. But, then, their proposal doesn’t reach the level of generality they aspire to. Third, as Devitt (2004) observes, **L&L** do not explain why a singular term-based approach cannot account for the ‘quantified into’ complex demonstratives **L&L** take an active interest in. And, given their marginal status, it is a mystery why one even needs to account for them. Finally, if **L&L** show anything, they show that complex demonstratives are ambiguous between singular and general terms. At the end of the day, I’m content with that. In 3.4, we discuss Neale’s view.

<sup>38</sup> Kripke (1979b) provides a case involving the complex demonstrative ‘that scoundrel’.

usage. In misdemonstration cases, this expectation goes unfulfilled. We arrive at an uneasy tension.<sup>39</sup>

Seizing upon this form of explanation, the ambiguity theorist provides a parallel explanation of misdescription cases. In misdescription cases, the referential use of a description is prompted by a causal/perceptual link to an individual. The individual, in such cases, lacks the property the nominal denotes. This fact leads to failed expectations and to an uneasy tension. As Devitt explains:

In Donnellan's case of misdescription, we feel a tension arising from the speaker having done something right and something wrong. ...The referentialist [i.e. ambiguity theorist] can explain the tension as I did: 'the F' is casually grounded in an object that 'F' does not apply to. (2004: 292, fn. 25).

By analogy, the ambiguity theorist arrives at a perfectly respectable account of the uneasy tension misdescription cases create.<sup>40</sup> The pragmatic approach, then, does not have an empirical edge over AT. Misdescription cases do not further the Russellian-Gricean's cause. The argument from misdescription falters.

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<sup>39</sup> Depending upon one's view of complex demonstratives, the uneasy tension can be further explained. Suppose the nominal 'F' contributes a property to the proposition expressed. In this case, where 'a' is the individual demonstrated, an utterance of a sentence-token exemplifying 'That F is G' expresses the complex proposition:

(v). (Fa & Ga).

In misdemonstration cases, one conjunct would be true, while the second would be false. Thus the speaker has done something wrong, but also something right. This gives rise to the uneasy tension. The tension is not unlike the tension normally associated with conjunctions that are false but have a true constituent. Now, suppose that the nominal does not contribute a property to the proposition expressed; it filters reference or provides a felicity condition instead. In the former case, the speaker fails to express a proposition but, nonetheless, gets across a true proposition. Hence, we arrive at an uneasy tension. In the latter case, the speaker produces an infelicitous utterance but, nonetheless, expresses a true proposition. This is the basis of the uneasy tension. On this analysis, the uneasy tension is analogous to the uneasy tension associated with an utterance of 'John is athletic but handsome', where John is both athletic and handsome. The utterance expresses a true proposition. But since being athletic and being handsome are not obviously contrastive, the utterance appears infelicitous. For further discussion, see 4.4.

<sup>40</sup> Depending upon one's view of the contribution the nominal makes in referential cases, further explanations are possible. For details, see the previous footnote and Wilson (1978: 69).

The argument from simplicity fares no better. This argument, remember, proceeds by analogy. Speakers can use uncontroversial quantifier phrases referentially. The pragmatic approach provides the most plausible explanation of this usage. The Russellian and the ambiguity theorist take the articles, on at least one reading, to be uncontroversial quantifier determiners. Guided by simplicity, we extend the pragmatic approach to referential uses of descriptions. The referential meaning of the articles is thereby rendered a theoretical redundancy. **QT** trumps **AT** on methodological grounds alone.

This argument can be challenged on three interrelated grounds. First, there are other unitary theses floating about in logical space. Thus, one can challenge the **implicit assumption** that methodological considerations provide support for **QT** alone. Second, one can challenge the analogy the argument stands upon; one can challenge the alleged overlap between referential uses of descriptions and uncontroversial quantifier phrases. Building upon these challenges, one can ask whether the argument from simplicity best supports, not **QT**, but, rather, a non-quantificational unitary thesis. We shall look at each challenge in turn.

Instead of attending Russell's school of descriptions, let's suppose that our dedicated Russellian was shipped off to Strawson's academy of descriptions. At the academy, Sir Peter Strawson (1950, 1952) expounds the doctrine that descriptions are univocally singular terms. The articles, Strawson explains, have a unitary semantics; they are devices of reference. Under Strawson's spell, our young Russellian becomes a true believer. Upon graduation, he swears to spread the word. Our dedicated Strawsonian pledges to uphold the referential unitary thesis:

**(RT) *The Referential Unitary Thesis.*** ‘A’ and ‘the’ are not semantically ambiguous. Each article simply denotes referential functions and descriptions are univocally singular terms.

After this ceremony, our dedicated Strawsonian begins his missionary work.

Outside the academy walls, he comes into contact with the ambiguity theorist. In an effort to save the savage’s soul, our missionary appeals to methodology.

Uncontroversial singular terms, the missionary explains, admit of attributive uses. In such cases, any sensible explanation will be non-semantic. You and I agree that, on at least one reading, descriptions are uncontroversial singular terms. On methodological grounds alone, then, **RT** is preferable to your primitive doctrine. For simplicity’s sake, you must become a Strawsonian and spread the word.

Intrigued but not quite convinced, the ambiguity theorist requests to see the evidence. Our missionary happily obliges. Our missionary requests that the ambiguity theorist consider complex demonstratives. There can be little doubt, the missionary continues, that complex demonstratives are univocal singular terms. Nonetheless, speakers can use these **DPs** attributively.<sup>41</sup> Observe. Sally and Mary are walking along the beach. In the sand, Sally sees a huge footprint. On the sole basis of the footprint, Sally utters:

11. That person has big feet.

Sally’s utterance contains standard attributive trademarks. General considerations prompt Sally’s utterance. She can felicitously supplement her utterance with ‘whoever that is’. Furthermore, Mary understands Sally without being acquainted with the person responsible for the footprint. It is not difficult, then, to conclude that Sally’s utterance

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<sup>41</sup> See Loar (1976), McGinn (1981), Schiffer (1981, 1995, 2005), Bertolet (1987), Nunberg (1993, 2004), Recanati (1993), and Bezuidenhout (1997). Stalnaker (1972) and Martinich (1979) claim that proper names admit of attributive uses. The following example is Loar’s.

**conveys** a general proposition. Where ‘*a*’ stands for ‘that footprint’, the proposition is presumably similar to:

12. [The *x*: person *x* & made (*x*, *a*)] (has-big-feet *x*).

In this context, we have a speaker using an uncontroversial singular term attributively.

This phenomenon isn’t limited to complex demonstratives. Donnellan’s distinction also extends to another uncontroversial type of singular term: non-anaphoric pronouns.<sup>42</sup>

Speakers, of course, can use non-anaphoric pronouns attributively. Glancing at the footprint, Sally utters ‘He has big feet’. Her utterance, once more, contains standard attributive trademarks. Again, general considerations prompt Sally’s utterance. And again, her utterance can be felicitously supplemented by ‘whoever that is’; her audience can understand her utterance despite their lack of acquaintance with the person responsible for the footprint. Her utterance **conveys** the general proposition:

13. [The *x*: male *x* & made (*x*, *a*)] (has-big-feet *x*).<sup>43</sup>

Even dedicated Russellians provide ammunition. Consider (14):

14. They ought to impeach the mayor.<sup>44</sup>

Sally utters (14) while driving through Freeport. The roads are a disaster. Potholes, obscured signs, broken traffic lights. Nothing is up to code. Evans (1982) introduced (14) to circumvent Strawson’s argument from incompleteness. But far from harming Strawson, Evans’s example actually aids him. In this context, Sally is using ‘they’ attributively. Her utterance **conveys** a general proposition that whoever is a resident of

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<sup>42</sup> Predictably, Neale holds that non-anaphoric pronouns are univocal general terms. In 3.4, we assess his stance.

<sup>43</sup> Perhaps one might want to modify this explication so that the property ‘being male’ doesn’t find its way into the proposition. Nothing, here, I believe, hangs upon adding or leaving out this content.

<sup>44</sup> See Evans (1982: 324 – 325).

this town ought to impeach the mayor of this town. In their normal role, however, non-anaphoric ‘they’-tokens are referential. Freeport holds a town meeting to discuss its terrible road situation. Freeport’s Board members, John and Mary, must decide to impeach the mayor or merely censure him. Referring to John and Mary, Sally utters (14). Here, Sally’s usage of ‘they’ is referential.

In these cases, it is absurd to assume that complex demonstratives and non-anaphoric pronouns are ambiguous between a quantificational and referential semantics. Rather, demonstratives and non-anaphoric pronouns have a univocal referential semantics. Attributive usage does not have semantical import. Its explanation is extra-semantic.

Consider (11). Given the conventional rules governing its usage, the referent of the complex demonstrative must be discovered within Sally and Mary’s shared perceptual environment. Sally and Mary are mutually aware that their shared perceptual environment does not include any plausible referential candidates. As such, Sally fails to express a proposition. Sally’s conversational contribution, then, appears to be uncooperative. But, Sally’s conversational contribution is obviously cooperative. Accordingly, it must ‘get across’ some proposition in a roundabout manner. Now, purely general considerations prompt Sally’s utterance. Sally’s utterance is grounded in a general belief, namely (12). Naturally, then,

- a. Sally thinks that (12) is required to make her conversational contribution consistent with the assumption that she is cooperative, and
- b. Sally thinks (and assumes that Mary thinks that Sally thinks) that Mary can work out, or grasp intuitively, that (12) is required to maintain Sally’s assumed cooperativeness.

The attributive usage of complex demonstratives has pragmatic import only; speakers can use sentence-tokens containing singular terms to **suggest** general propositions.<sup>45</sup>

Let's stipulate, our missionary continues, that some version of English, Strawson-English, conforms to **RT**. It is not hard to imagine that, from time to time, speakers of Strawson-English would use singular terms attributively. It is not hard, then, to imagine that speakers of Strawson-English would, from time to time, use descriptions attributively. Donnellan's distinction extends to a language that, by stipulation, contains univocal referential articles. Thus, the mere existence of Donnellan's distinction in English does not, in and of itself, entail that English is not Strawson-English. Thus, Donnellan's distinction does not threaten **RT**.<sup>46</sup>

The foregoing considerations show us that theoretical simplicity doesn't provide support for **QT** alone. Sure, speakers can use uncontroversial quantifier phrases referentially. And sure, the best explanation of such usage is non-semantic. So, sure, **QT** is simpler than **AT**.<sup>47</sup> But, surely, speakers can use uncontroversial singular terms attributively. And surely, the best explanation of such usage is non-semantic. So, surely, **RT** is simpler than **AT**. Arguments from simplicity support **QT** at least as well as they supports **RT**. Why, then, chose Russell over Strawson? By itself, the argument from

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<sup>45</sup> Notice that I have not labeled (12) an implicature. Instead, I stuck to the neutral term '**suggest**'. For Grice, implicatures are parasitic on the proposition expressed. In our case, no proposition has been expressed. Thus, it would be a perversion of the term 'conversational implicature' to attach it to (12).

<sup>46</sup> Here, the Strawsonian utilizes Kripke (1979b) Russell-English argument for his own purposes. Here is a second Strawsonian utilization of Kripke. Russian, as is well-known, does not contain any (phonologically full) articles. Now, the Russian translation of an English utterance of a sentence-token exemplifying 'The F is G' is 'This F is G'. In Russian, English definite descriptions are treated as complex demonstratives; they are treated as singular terms. Contra Russell, Russian does not interpret 'the F' as 'whatever is uniquely F'.

<sup>47</sup> Larson and Segal disagree. See (1995: 349).

simplicity doesn't provide any clue. On methodological grounds alone, the decision between **QT** and **RT** carries the distinct smell of arbitrariness.<sup>48</sup>

Furthermore, the pragmatic approach characterizes referential uses of descriptions as GCIs. There is a natural reason for this move. The default interpretation of uses of definite descriptions, Klein tells us, is referential.<sup>49</sup> As such, Klein suggests that the attributive use of definite descriptions is the special case that needs explaining. Presumably, the same holds for indefinite descriptions.

The referential use of uncontroversial quantifier phrases, however, is most naturally assimilated to PCIs. Speakers can use sentence-tokens containing uncontroversial quantifier phrases to communicate singular propositions only in highly specialized conversational contexts. Such implicatures cannot be assumed to invariably or even normally attach to utterances of uncontroversial quantifier phrases. Furthermore, the referential use of uncontroversial quantifier phrases is theoretically uninteresting. It is

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<sup>48</sup> To be clear, I am not claiming that the articles **began** their lives as univocal devices of reference. Nor am I claiming that the articles **began** their lives as univocal devices of quantification. This is an empirical matter which I am not qualified to address. Those, however, that do feel qualified to address this issue have maintained that at least the English definite article evolved from a simple demonstrative. For instance, Christophersen claims that:

Modern English *the* is a continuation of the Indo-European pronominal stem *\*to*. The function was not originally that of an article; we meet the word in historic times as a demonstrative pronoun. (1939: 84). (See 4.3.1.1, fn. 21 for Christophersen's view on the origins of 'a'.) The *OED* gives a similar analysis. Lyons describes a general procedure in which demonstratives, quite generally, are 'bleached' into definite articles:

Demonstratives are...overwhelmingly the most common source [for definite articles]. The semantic weakening or 'bleaching' taken to be involved in the shift from demonstrative to article reflects a very general diachronic process of devaluation of lexical content. This process can be described in terms of loss of lexico-semantic features, and in the case we are concerned with it is essentially the feature [+ Dem] [i.e. the presence of the 'demonstrative' feature] which is affected. (1998: 331).

If anything, I would hang my hat on the following conceptual claim. It is possible, highly likely, in fact, that any primary stage of English which included either univocal referential articles or univocal quantificational articles would, over time, evolve into a form of English that contained articles that, as a matter of semantics, performed both referential and quantificational functions.

<sup>49</sup> Klein tells us that:

There may well be other contextual clues which lead a hearer to conclude that a description is being used attributively. But the default interpretation is the referential one. (1980: 87).

entirely expected that, in highly specialized circumstances, a speaker can use a sentence-token containing an uncontroversial quantifier phrase in the subject position to communicate a singular proposition. In fact, what would be theoretically interesting would be the inability of speakers to use such phrases referentially on occasion.

The referential use of descriptions, on the other hand, **is** theoretically interesting. Their chief interest lies in their frequency and relative independence of contextual circumstances.<sup>50</sup> Accordingly, the explanation of referential uses of uncontroversial quantifier phrases should be distinctly different from the explanation of the referential use of descriptions. To support its conclusion, the Russellian-Gricean's argument from simplicity must provide a unified account of referential usage. He can complete this task in only one of two ways. Either he characterizes referential uses of descriptions as PCIs or he characterizes referential uses of uncontroversial quantifier phrases as GCIs. The former option fails to account for the seemingly default interpretation of descriptions, while the latter fails to account for the highly specialized nature of referential uses of uncontroversial quantifier phrases. Thus, the Russellian-Gricean's argument from simplicity seems to rest on a very weak analogy.

Interestingly, the Strawsonian **might** have a slight edge over the Russellian-Gricean. First, the Strawsonian can explain the commonality of referential usage and its default interpretation semantically. The default interpretation is referential because descriptions are singular terms. More importantly, the attributive use of descriptions and, say, complex demonstratives might form a more natural comparison class. Attributive uses of complex demonstratives are the special case. So, if one believes, as Klein does, that

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<sup>50</sup> As Devitt (1981b) hinted, these characteristics distinguish Russell-English from Standard English. See Devitt (2004) also. These insights are the basis for the argument from convention.

attributive uses of descriptions are the special case, then we are naturally led to a better comparison class.

Theoretical simplicity, then, might provide general support for unitary theses. It does not, however, provide particular support for **QT**. In fact, theoretical simplicity seems to cut in favor of **RT**. Within Russell's account, the argument from simplicity rests on, at best, a very weak analogy. Now, within Strawson's account, the argument from simplicity might rest on a stronger analogy. That is, attributive uses of uncontroversial singular terms and descriptions might cohere more naturally than referential uses of uncontroversial quantifier phrases and descriptions do. The Russellian-Gricean would do best to steer clear of the argument from simplicity. The pragmatic approach does not gain any serious justificatory support from it. Instead, any justificatory support that could be mustered from these methodological asides belongs to the Strawsonian.

With the argument from simplicity sidelined, the argument from uniformity unravels. This corollary argument, let's not forget, is anchored upon the assumption that the referential use of descriptions and the referential use of uncontroversial quantifier phrases compose a uniform class. From this assumption, the Russellian-Gricean infers that referential uses of descriptions and uncontroversial quantifier phrases demand a uniform account. The Russellian-Gricean, unlike the ambiguity theorist, is said to meet this demand.

Now, as we saw above, the referential use of descriptions and uncontroversial quantifier phrases do not compose a uniform class. The referential use of descriptions is common. The default interpretation of description usage seems to be referential. From the Russellian-Gricean perspective, such usage must be classified as GCIs. The

referential use of quantifier phrases, however, is uncommon. The default interpretation of uncontroversial quantifier phrases is attributive. Their referential usage, therefore, is naturally assimilated to uninteresting PCIs. Although both types of usage receive pragmatic accounts, the specific accounts are **heterogeneous**. This heterogeneity illuminates a simple fact: the referential use of descriptions is fundamentally distinct from the referential use of uncontroversial quantifier phrases. Accordingly, the Russellian-Gricean's demand for a uniform account is unwarranted and, more importantly, counterproductive.

Here, too, the Strawsonian might undercut the Russellian. Taking Klein at his word, the attributive use of descriptions and uncontroversial singular terms seem to form a slightly more uniform class than the referential use of descriptions and uncontroversial quantifier phrases do. Thus, if Klein is correct, the Strawsonian, not the Russellian, might benefit, if only marginally, from considerations pertaining to uniformity. The Russellian gains little from such methodological musings.

The argument from uniformity, then, fails on at least two accounts. First, it is not clear that methodological considerations pertaining to uniformity are relevant; the referential use of descriptions differs significantly from the referential use of uncontroversial quantifier phrases. Second, even if such considerations were relevant, they would not work in the Russellian-Gricean's favor. Uniformity parallels simplicity. This, of course, is no coincidence. As its corollary, the argument from uniformity inherits its predecessor's blemishes. It is expected, then, that the argument from uniformity share the same fate as the argument from simplicity.

Within **AT**, the referential use of descriptions and the referential use of uncontroversial quantifier phrases receive radically different treatments. Thus, the ambiguity theorist avoids conflating referential uses of descriptions with referential uses of uncontroversial quantifier phrases. It is this treatment that represents good methodology.

The pragmatic approach receives no independent support from the argument from simplicity, uniformity, or misdescription. In each case, we have found significant flaws that deny the arguments any significant justificatory function. The Russellian-Gricean is left without any independent reasons for adopting **QT**. With these failures exposed, the pragmatic approach loses its initial appeal. With the loss of its initial appeal, the pragmatic approach itself comes into question.

### *3.3.6 The Collapse of the Pragmatic Approach*

As we shall see, the pragmatic approach fails in three respects. First, the pragmatic approach cannot account for the referential use of descriptions inside conditionals. Second, the pragmatic approach cannot adequately account for at least some referential uses of ‘incomplete’ definite descriptions. And, third, the pragmatic approach cannot capture the regular and conventional status of referential usage. Consequently, the pragmatic approach collapses. Interestingly, the ambiguity theorist can account for each phenomenon. The collapse of the pragmatic approach, then, helps strengthen the case for **AT**. This time, we begin at the beginning.

#### *3.3.6.1 The Pragmatic Approach and Conditionals*

According to Grice, conversational implicatures are parasitic on the speaker having expressed the proposition he expressed. Only assertive utterances of complete sentence-

tokens express propositions. So, unasserted constituents of a sentence-token cannot generate a conversational implicature. When a speaker utters a conditional, for example, the use of the conditional's antecedent cannot generate a conversational implicature. Now, suppose that an utterance of a sentence-token  $\lceil s \rceil$  seems to generate a conversational implicature  $\lceil q \rceil$ . On Grice's account, when  $\lceil s \rceil$  functions as the antecedent of a conditional, an utterance of the entire conditional does not communicate  $\lceil q \rceil$ . If an utterance of the conditional conveys  $\lceil q \rceil$  anyway, then, in this environment,  $\lceil s \rceil$  contributes  $\lceil q \rceil$  to the proposition expressed.<sup>51</sup> On the plausible assumption that  $\lceil s \rceil$ 's semantic function inside a conditional is identical to its function outside of the conditional, we naturally infer that if the conditional conveys  $\lceil q \rceil$ , then  $\lceil s \rceil$  does not communicate  $\lceil q \rceil$  *simpliciter*.<sup>52</sup>

Now surely speakers can use definite descriptions referentially inside conditionals. Sally is at Jones's sentencing. Sally predicts that:

15. If the murderer<sup>1</sup> is insane, then he<sub>1</sub> will receive psychological counseling.

In this context, Sally conveys:

16. <<<Jones, Insane>, <<Jones, Psychological-counseling> Receive>> COND>.

In (15), 'the murderer is insane' functions as the antecedent of a conditional. Still, Sally uses the definite description referentially. She uses it to refer to Jones and say something about him. The pragmatic approach, remember, is inoperative inside conditionals.

Nonetheless, speakers can use definite descriptions referentially inside conditionals.

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<sup>51</sup> See Recanati (1989a, 1993), Carston (1988), Levinson (2000), and Neale (2004) for further discussion.

<sup>52</sup> The assumption almost always holds. It only seems to run into trouble with some 'metalinguistic' uses of logical operators. However, since we shall be avoiding such usage, the assumption is unproblematic. See Recanati (1989a, 1993) and Levinson (2000) for further discussion.

This referential usage cannot be treated as a GCI. So, the pragmatic approach cannot account for the referential use of definite descriptions inside conditionals.

Referential uses of indefinite descriptions can also occur inside conditionals. Sally has a sneaking suspicion that John went to her apartment while she was teaching. She believes he went there to borrow her signed copy of *Naming and Necessity*. Sally tells Mary:

17. If a book of mine is missing, then John visited my apartment.

Sally uses ‘a book of mine’ to refer to her signed copy of *Naming and Necessity*. The pragmatic approach, remember, is inoperative. Nonetheless, Sally uses the indefinite description referentially. So, the pragmatic approach cannot account for the referential usage of indefinite descriptions inside conditionals either.

On the plausible assumption that the semantic function of the articles remains constant inside and outside conditionals, the pragmatic approach fails to account for referential uses of descriptions *simpliciter*. The Russellian-Gricean, then, is left without an account of referential usage.<sup>53</sup> Within **AT**, however, the referential use of descriptions inside and outside conditionals admits of a simple explanation. When a speaker uses a description referentially, the speaker employs a referential article. A speaker can employ such articles inside or outside conditional. After all, a speaker can use ‘hot’ to denote a high temperature or level of spiciness inside or outside a conditional. Furthermore, within **AT**, the referential use of descriptions inside and outside of conditionals is handled in a completely uniform manner. So, **AT** is, at the

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<sup>53</sup> The Russellian-Gricean could, of course, revise his Gricean framework. That is, he might claim that **CP** and its attending maxims operate within conditionals; they operate on units smaller than propositions. On this revision, (15) and (17) would not pose a problem. I, for one, am unaware of any Russellian-Gricean that implements this kind of revision.

very least, methodologically superior to **QT**. At best, **AT** is explanatorily superior as well.<sup>54</sup>

Notice that the Russellian-Gricean cannot object to our assumption the articles have the same semantic function inside and outside conditionals. That objection, in effect, repudiates a univocal account of the articles. So, the objection, in effect, repudiates **QT**. Thus, on pains of self-contradiction, the Russellian-Gricean must accept the assumption. To accept the assumption, however, is to accept the falsification of the pragmatic approach. Either way, **AT** is superior to **QT**.

On the pragmatic approach, assertive utterances containing referential uses of descriptions express general propositions. The general propositions serve as input for the conversational generation of singular propositions. Thus, whenever a speaker uses a description referentially, the Russellian-Gricean maintains that the speaker expresses a general proposition. Furthermore, the Russellian-Gricean maintains that the speaker believes that the logical subject of the implicated singular proposition uniquely satisfies the description.<sup>55</sup> Considerations pertaining to ‘incomplete’ definite descriptions cast doubt on this position.

### *3.3.6.2 The Pragmatic Approach and Referential Uses of ‘Incomplete’ Definite Descriptions*

In 2.3.1, we saw that some uses of definite descriptions are ‘incomplete’. Referential uses of definite descriptions are no different. A referential use of ‘the murderer’ in an utterance of ‘the murderer is insane’ is incomplete; numerous individuals, unfortunately, are murderers. Nonetheless, Sally can use the incomplete definite description to convey

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<sup>54</sup> A similar argument also extends to **RT**.

<sup>55</sup> Bach (1987, 2004) is a rare exception. See below.

that Jones is insane. On the pragmatic approach, then, Sally's utterance expresses a general proposition. Furthermore, the Russellian-Gricean takes Sally to believe her intended target satisfies the definite description. The Russellian-Gricean's task is to locate a general proposition that Sally might sensibly commit herself to.

At first blush, the Russellian-Gricean might hold that Sally's utterance expresses:

18. [The  $x$ : murderer  $x$ ] (insane  $x$ ).

The Russellian-Gricean, then, commits Sally to believing that the universe contains one and only one murderer, namely Jones. Here, the Russellian-Gricean behaves quite uncharitably. Sally is not **that** naïve.<sup>56</sup> Consequently, the Russellian-Gricean must locate some other general proposition.

The Russellian-Gricean might seek to avoid his uncharitable behavior by adopting either the explicit or implicit approach.<sup>57</sup> On the former approach, the Russellian-Gricean might claim Sally's utterance expresses:

19. [The  $x$ : murderer  $x$  & in ( $x$ , court 5)] (insane  $x$ ).

On the latter approach, he might claim Sally's utterance is assessed against a domain of discourse, like, say, court 5. In this manner, the Russellian-Gricean avoids being uncharitable. His view no longer commits Sally to such wild beliefs.

Neither approach, however, will do. As Wilson (1991) demonstrated, sometimes a speaker that uses a definite description referentially might be too ignorant to fall back on a sentence-token containing a 'fuller' definite description uniquely identifying the

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<sup>56</sup> According to Bach (1987, 2004), the speaker does utter an obvious falsehood. The speaker uses the sentence-token in a standard non-literal fashion. He assumes that his audience will recognize his standard non-literal usage and begin the search for a more suitable interpretation, namely a singular proposition. Following Wilson (1991: 372, fn. 14) and Neale (2004: 108, fn. 53), we reject this view.

<sup>57</sup> See 2.3.2 for details. We shall ignore the hidden-indexical approach since it inherits all the problems of the implicit approach.

intended target.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, a speaker might, in some cases, be too ignorant to supply a domain of discourse that contains the intended target as the unique satisfier of the definite description. So, when faced with an ignorant speaker, the Russellian-Gricean's task becomes impossible.<sup>59</sup> Let's illustrate.<sup>60</sup>

After retirement, Sally moved to Tampa Bay, Florida. While on one of her daily afternoon walks, she caught a glimpse of a face that caused her great distress and mental anguish. To add to her distress, Sally was unable to discover why this face ought to cause so much anguish; unfortunately, her memory had become rather spotty since retirement. The rest of her afternoon was filled with various introspective analyses about her distress. Later that night, she had completely forgotten that the perception of the face caused her anguish and, at the same time, became convinced, as she says, that 'the murderer is here'. She now believes that this is the cause of her anguish.

Although Sally obstinately asserts that she is entertaining a singular proposition, she admits that she has seen many murderers in her time. In her youth, she had regularly attended murder trials. Due to her faulty memory, she is unable to fall back upon a 'fuller' definite description that the logical subject of the singular proposition uniquely satisfies. Nor can she restrict the domain of discourse to that one individual in any non-parasitic or redundant manner.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> The explicit approach faces another serious problem. A speaker can fall back on numerous completions. Accordingly, there appears to be no principle basis for determining the completion the speaker had in mind, assuming that he had one in mind. Thus, there appears to be no principled basis for determining the proposition that generates the requisite GCI. For an overview, see Devitt (2004).

<sup>59</sup> This argument parallels Kripke's (1972) ignorance argument against the description theory of names.

<sup>60</sup> The following example is Wilson's (1991: 373).

<sup>61</sup> See Devitt (2004: 300 – 303).

Now, Jones's face closely resembles the face Sally saw. Furthermore, only Jones's image triggers Sally's anguish. And, most importantly, if Sally saw Jones as he was during Smith's murder trial, she would immediately recognize that Jones is the murderer that she means by her use of 'the murderer'. That is, it is Jones that prompts her usage of the definite description. Thus, her utterance, at the very least, **conveys** the singular proposition:

20. <<Jones, Tampa Bay> In>.

Sally's ignorance, however, precludes the Russellian-Gricean from utilizing the explicit or implicit approach to locate the required general proposition. Thus, the pragmatic approach is unable to capture ignorant speakers' referential use of incomplete definite descriptions.

The ambiguity theorist, in contrast, can account for ignorant speakers' referential use of incomplete definite descriptions. The ignorant speaker utilizes the referential definite article. Thus, the description he uses is a singular term. Its referent is determined by a causal/perceptual link to the individual that appropriately prompted the speaker's utterance. In Sally's case, Jones fits the bill. Accordingly, Jones is the logical subject of the singular proposition. There is nothing **incomplete** about the definite description!

### *3.3.6.3 The Pragmatic Approach and Convention*

Finally, as Devitt (1981b, 1997, 2004, 2006a), Devitt and Sterelny (1997), and Reimer (1998a) have demonstrated, the pragmatic approach cannot properly account for the conventional status of referential usage. The 'argument from convention', as Neale (2004) labels it, undermines the pragmatic approach. Interestingly, one can extend the argument from convention in order to undermine the pragmatic argument for **RT**. Most

importantly, **AT** entails the conventional status of referential and attributive usage. Thus, the argument from convention provides a very strong case for adopting **AT**.

Within English, the referential use of descriptions is ubiquitous.<sup>62</sup> Speakers **regularly** use descriptions referentially. More formally, the referential use of descriptions is statistically common.<sup>63</sup> If a speaker wishes to convey a singular proposition, it is fairly standard for the speaker to satisfy that desire through the employment of a description. Furthermore, audiences regularly interpret descriptions referentially.

The statistical commonality of such usage strongly suggests that the referential use of descriptions is a conventional feature of English. Its conventional status, in turn, suggests a referential semantic convention holding among the articles. Thus, the referential usage of descriptions appears to reflect the articles' referential meanings. At best, then, Russell's analysis seems to miss the mark.

Under this light, the pragmatic approach is best viewed as an attempt to explain a convention, the referential use of descriptions, with the aid of the theory of conversational implicature. Presumably, this position occupies a region in logical space. The theory of conversational implicature, after all, is extremely powerful. Indeed, it can generate almost any proposition from almost any proposition.<sup>64</sup> So, surely, one could

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<sup>62</sup> See Klein (1980), Devitt (1981b, 2004), Bach (1987, 2004), Reimer (1998a), Neale (1990, 2004), Kaplan (2005), Buchanan and Ostertag (2005), and Schiffer (2005).

<sup>63</sup> Reimer (1998a) introduces the term 'statistically common'. While Reimer holds that referential uses of definite descriptions are statistically common, she is skeptical that the referential usage of indefinite descriptions is a statistical commonality.

<sup>64</sup> Saddock expresses the point in a negative manner:  
The Cooperative Principle with its maxims...is so vague that almost anything can be 'worked out' on the basis of almost any meaning. (1978: 368).

hold that a convention of a language is a derivational effect of the cooperative nature of conversation.

This tactic, however, is not amenable to actual linguistic practice. Reflections upon Grice's razor unveil its detrimental consequences. Grice's razor, remember, demands that theorists refrain from unnecessarily proliferating senses. Now, suppose that the conversational reduction of conventions is an entirely legitimate practice. As Jackson notes, Grice's razor seems to lead one:

To adopt a theory which assigns the same sense to **every** utterance and accounts for every difference [among the propositions conveyed] conversationally – leaning heavily on the idea of generalized implicature, and saying perhaps that although 'It is nearly bedtime' actually **means** 'Hail to the sacred Mushroom!' the speaker's choice of these words rather than others on this occasion, together with other features of the context, indicates to a hearer who expects him to make appropriate, sincere, and helpfully expressed remarks what his real message is. (1975: 158 – 159). (His emphasis).

More shockingly, if the conversational reduction of regularities is entirely legitimate, then, with one swift application of Grice's razor, all conventional meanings are shaved away. Following Devitt (2004), let's travel to the time before language. At this stage of history, one cannot find conventional meanings. Nonetheless, one could imagine that our ancestors engaged in communication. One tribesman produces sounds along, perhaps, with some gestures; working with assumptions about the tribesman's intentions and a rich contextual background, the tribesman's audience **derives** the tribesman's

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Saddock attributes this 'unavoidable characteristic' of Grice's theory to Grice's goal of providing a (partial) account of metaphor through the application of CP and its attending maxims. Devitt's characterization is somewhat more neutral:

Grice shows us that with enough stage setting almost any expression can be used to convey almost any thought. (2004: 283).

As Saddock points out, this unavoidable characteristic reduces derivability to a trivial necessary condition. Little could fail to be derivable.

intended message. In the pre-linguistic era, speaker meanings are entirely worked out.<sup>65</sup> Through **regular** usage, our ancestors' sounds and gestures absorb the messages that they had previously suggested through **derivations**. The linguistic-era explodes onto the scene. During the linguistic-era, words are manufactured at a dizzying pace. We arrive at full-blown lexicons. Suppose again that the conversational supplementation of conventional features of a language is entirely legitimate. Ideally, contemporary audiences could perform the same derivations as their pre-linguistic ancestors. The shift from the pre-linguistic era to the linguistic era, then, represents one continuous violation of Grice's razor. To get practice back into line with sound methodological principles requires time travel; we must march back to the pre-linguistic era. The pragmatic approach in conjunction with Grice's razor leads to the elimination of meanings altogether.<sup>66</sup> In particular, the pragmatic approach strips the articles of their quantificational meanings. Thus, the pragmatic approach is both counterproductive and faulty. It is counterproductive since it eliminates its very own subject matter, namely the semantic content of the articles, as well as its own positive semantic proposal. It is faulty

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<sup>65</sup> For a similar mythical story, see Grice (1989: 292 – 297).

<sup>66</sup> Here's Devitt:

Our [Gricean] fundamentalist [i.e. someone who explains the regularity of referential usage in a Gricean manner] is not inclined to say this at all: 'There is no need to take these first meanings to be conventional because they can all be derived from assumptions about the context and other minds. We must always remember the words of Grice. His 'Modified Occam's Razor' tells us 'Senses are not to be multiplied beyond necessity'. I say unto you that no senses are necessary'. (2004: 284).

Neale (p.c.) maintains that this response does not fit into a truly Gricean framework. In such a framework, what a speaker means is severely constrained by his audience-directed intentions. Such intentions are, in turn, dramatically constrained by the speaker's beliefs about, among other things, the audience's ability to grasp the speaker's thoughts or desires through various mediums of communication. In the present case, Neale maintains that the speaker could simply not have the audience-directed intentions Devitt's fundamentalist Gricean has. See Neale (2004: 77) for details.

since it falsely entails that the articles are devoid of semantic content. On these grounds alone, it ought to be rejected.<sup>67</sup>

The Russellian-Gricean might respond to these charges by making a fuss about the ignorance of contemporary speakers. Speakers, it is safe to assume, cannot reproduce our ancestors' derivations. They can, however, conversationally derive referential uses of descriptions. Thus, the Russellian-Gricean can claim that the above *reductio ad absurdum* depends on a bad analogy.

Still, the Russellian-Gricean should not feel comforted by the ignorance of his contemporaries. As Devitt (2004) explains, the ignorance of contemporary speakers is a contingent and irrelevant matter. With a healthy diet of historical linguistics, such ignorance could be lost. Our diet would not, however, reduce the number of conventional meanings at all. Consequently, the analogy ceases to seem faulty if we could, ideally, cure our ignorance.

There is, however, no need to speculate here. For we have at our disposal semantic conventions that the language community could, epistemically speaking, derive from other semantic conventions. In these cases, the theorist that defers to Grice's razor will provide faulty analyses. Thus, the Russellian-Gricean shall also provide faulty analyses.

Consider dead metaphors. Suppose that the theory of conversational implicature provides a proper analysis of metaphor. In that case, each metaphorical use of a token,

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<sup>67</sup> The same style of argument carries over to Szabó's (2000, 2003, 2005) and Ludlow and Segal's (2004) (**L&S**, hereafter) contention that 'the' contributes the INDEF. function to the proposition expressed. In order to explain the uniqueness readings associated with attributive uses of definite descriptions, Szabó and **L&S** lean on pragmatics. Such readings, they claim, are GCIs. Now, the uniqueness readings associated with definite descriptions are surely common, standard, regular, systematic, and cross-linguistic. Thus, they must also be a direct function of linguistic meaning. To treat them otherwise is to succumb to the argument from convention. As such, Szabó's and **L&S**'s novel semantic proposal fails. The definite article does not contribute the INDEF. function to the proposition expressed. At the very least, Russell is safe from Szabó and **L&S**.

‘ $p$ ’, must be derivable from the proposition expressed by an utterance of a sentence-token containing ‘ $p$ ’, **CP** and its attending maxims, the context of the utterance, general background assumptions, and the like. Of course, over time, some of these metaphors ‘die’. The phrase used to trigger a metaphor absorbs the metaphor as one of its meanings.<sup>68</sup>

The lexical item ‘hawk’ provides a textbook case. In English, ‘hawk’ is conventionally linked with two distinct meanings. On the one hand, ‘hawk’ denotes birds of prey. Let’s call this meaning its ‘non-political meaning’. On the other hand, ‘hawk’ denotes those that advocate a warlike policy. Let’s call this meaning its ‘political meaning’. Of course, ‘hawk’ wasn’t always linked with two distinct meanings. Traditionally, speakers would make use of the non-political meaning to conversationally implicate the political meaning. Audiences, on the other hand, would make use of the non-political meaning and Gricean machinery to derive the political meaning. The implications and derivations presumably centered on quality. During this period, one can imagine, a pacifist might criticize a politician by calling him a hawk. The pacifist’s utterance expresses a blatant falsehood; humans are not birds. Thus, at a superficial level, the pacifist has violated the quality maxim. The politician, however, has no reason to believe that the pacifist is being uncooperative; he’s a pacifist after all. Accordingly, the politician takes the pacifist as communicating that he has some property typically associated with birds of prey. In this case, the property is their warlike behavior. Through some inferential process, the politician reasons that:

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<sup>68</sup> For some background, see Levinson (1984: 165 - 166).

- a. The pacifist thinks that the supposition that I'm behaving in a warlike manner is required to make his conversational contribution consistent with the assumption that he is cooperative, and
- b. The pacifist thinks (and assumes that I think that he thinks) that I can work out, or grasp intuitively, that the supposition that I'm behaving in a warlike manner is required to maintain his adherence to the quality maxim.

At some definitive period, speakers and audiences ceased to perform this intricate dance.

At that point, English had acquired one more ambiguity. This mutation allowed speakers and audiences to bypass the implicational/derivational process and, instead, directly express and understand the political meaning of 'hawk'. The language community had given birth to a new semantic convention.

Presumably, members of our language community can still 'work out' the political meaning of 'hawk' from its non-political meaning; **we** just did. So, those under the spell of Grice's razor must conclude that 'hawk' is actually univocal. Obviously, this analysis is empirically inadequate; 'hawk' is ambiguous. Generalizing somewhat, we see that if a theorist adopts the pragmatic approach and accepts that speakers regularly and, thereby, conventionally use descriptions referentially, the theorist must also conclude that the set of dead metaphors is empty. Here we have a false entailment. Thus, the pragmatic approach is unsatisfactory.<sup>69</sup>

The argument from convention also makes trouble for the Strawsonian. Although referential usage is more common, speakers regularly use descriptions attributively. This regularity, in turn, suggests that the attributive use of descriptions is a semantic convention. Thus, a pragmatic account of the attributive use of descriptions is bound to run into the same problems that the pragmatic account of referential usage ran into. The

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<sup>69</sup> Providing a similar style of argument, Saddock (1978) demonstrated that derivability is not a sufficient condition for conversational implicatures.

quasi-pragmatic approach our Strawsonian expounded, then, shares the same fate as its Russellian counterpart. **RT** cannot account for the conventional status of the attributive use of descriptions.<sup>70, 71</sup> **AT**, however, can.

Here's how. The articles are ambiguous between quantificational and referential meanings. Conventionally, then, descriptions have two semantical functions. On a semantic plane, descriptions are either singular or general terms. Referential usage reflects the referential semantics of the articles; attributive usage reflects the quantificational semantics of the articles. On the assumption that the articles are ambiguous, one would expect that speakers would regularly use descriptions attributively and referentially. Now, the conventional status of attributive and referential usage is built into **AT**. Furthermore, **AT** anticipates the statistical commonality of each usage. In these respects, the ambiguity theorist surpasses the Russellian-Gricean and the Strawsonian. Ideological underpinnings aside, **AT** seems to be the rational choice.

Before closing, we should address a certain conflict surrounding the import of the argument from convention. Summarizing his achievements, Devitt tells us that:

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<sup>70</sup> Sainsbury (2002, 2004, 2006) maintains that definite descriptions are ambiguous (they have both a referential and predicational meaning). Interestingly, he claims that attributive uses of definite descriptions are "a species of referential uses" (2002: 188). As such, Sainsbury's account of Donnellan's distinction fails to capture the regularity of attributively used descriptions. There are, however, other reasons to be suspicious of Sainsbury's account. First, Sainsbury places his account of referential descriptions within a negative free logic. Accordingly, he rejects: (a) that empty singular terms are indeed 'meaningless', (b) that singular terms are scopeless, and (c) that grasping the meaning of a singular term requires being acquainted with its referent as its referent. Although Sainsbury provides ingenious arguments for these seemingly counterintuitive positions, ultimately, it pays to be skeptical of them. Second, on Sainsbury's (2004, 2006) view, all attributive uses of definite descriptions must be rigid since, as he puts it, "only rigid subject expressions should be counted as referring expressions" (2004: 388). This is yet another tough pill to swallow. Finally, and most importantly, Sainsbury segregates indefinite descriptions from definite descriptions. Indefinite descriptions, unlike definite descriptions, are not treated as 'subject-expressions':

The notion of subject-predicate sentence I shall work with does not count indefinite descriptions ('a(n) F') and explicit 'quantifier phrases' as themselves subject-expressions. (2004: 374). Obviously, this position runs roughshod over the intuitive and well-established contention that the indefinite article and the definite article are members of the same semantic category or categories.

<sup>71</sup> See Wilson (1984: 25) for other compelling reasons to reject **RT**.

Neale's comparison of [the referential use of definite descriptions] with the referential use of other quantifiers seemed to be a persuasive argument.... I claim to have rebutted that argument. Perhaps another argument can be mounted comparing the referential use of definites persuasively to other phenomena that seems to be pragmatic; for example, to 'generalized' conversational implicatures. (2004: 286).

Here Devitt implies that the argument from convention extends only to pragmatic approaches that treat referential uses of descriptions as PCIs. Bach picks up on the implication:

Devitt takes his opponents to be likening referential uses to **particularized** conversational implicatures, whose understanding requires a fancy inference on the part of the hearer. It is not clear to me that this is Kripke's or Neale's view, but it is definitely not mine. (2004: 225). (His emphasis).

Bach continues:

[The argument from convention] is directed only to the analogy of referential uses with particularized conversational implicatures. I take referential uses to be akin to **generalized** implicatures. (2004: 227). (His emphasis).

Neale, on the other hand, concedes that:

The Argument from Convention undermines only the standard, wooden, Gricean explanation of referential usage (like the one I sketched in *Descriptions*), which amounts to no more than a generalized conversational implicature story. (2004: 173).

So Devitt and Bach believe that the argument from convention only undermines a PCI account of referential usage, while Neale takes it to undermine his own GCI account.<sup>72</sup> What has gone wrong here?

Neale's concession is warranted (and appreciated). The argument from convention does undermine GCI accounts of referential usage. Since the referential usage of descriptions amounts to a regularity, only GCI accounts are plausible;

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<sup>72</sup> More recently, Devitt (2006a) has extended the argument from convention to GCI accounts. For a reply, see Bach (2006a, 2006b).

generally speaking, PCIs are not regularized. The GCI account, however, must fail since referential usage is also conventional. If GCI accounts encompass referential usage, then one becomes saddled with unsavory results. Dead metaphors or, worse yet, conventional meanings become ontological fictions.<sup>73</sup>

Devitt's assessment seems to be based on an erroneous assumption. Devitt seems to assume that GCIs need not be derivable.<sup>74</sup> On this assumption, Devitt infers that the Russellian-Gricean that provides a derivation of referential usage is providing a PCI account. But, as we have seen, all **implicatures** are necessarily derivable. The Russellian-Gricean that provides a derivation is simply fulfilling his Gricean obligations.

Under the weight of referential uses of descriptions inside conditionals, ignorant speakers' referential use of incomplete definite descriptions, and the conventional status of referential usage, the pragmatic approach collapses. As we observed, every phenomenon that remains unexplainable within the pragmatic approach, finds a plausible explanation within **AT**. It is no stretch, then, to see the collapse of the pragmatic

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<sup>73</sup> Bach criticizes the argument from convention on several different grounds. Devitt (2006a) decisively counters most of these arguments. One criticism Devitt does not take up is Bach's claim that the argument from convention over-extends. As Bach sees it:

This regularity argument would lead to the conclusion that in sentences such as [(vi)] ... 'and' [has] some special conventional meanings.

(vi). It is worse to go to the hospital and get sick than to get sick and go to the hospital.

In [(vi)] 'and' indicates a causal relation in its first occurrence and a temporal relation in its second. These uses are quite regular, but there are (well-known) Gricean explanations for them.

Yet Devitt's argument implies that these uses, being regularized, are conventional, hence that 'and' is ambiguous in at least three ways. (2004: 227).

Bach is correct to notice that Devitt's argument extends to 'and'. However, he is wrong to claim that Devitt's argument implies that 'and' is at least three ways ambiguous. Devitt's argument only implies that the Gricean position regarding the semantics of 'and' is false. But, then again, Cohen (1971) demonstrated this long ago. One can account for all the indications of 'and' under a univocal-relational semantics of 'and'. See, for example, Cohen (1971), Carston (1988), and Pupa (2006). For further details concerning the Devitt-Bach debate, see Devitt (2006a, 2006b), and Bach (2006a, 2006b).

<sup>74</sup> See Devitt (1997, 2004) and Neale (2004: 173, fn. 146).

approach as providing the ambiguity theorist with the needed materials to build his case.

The argument from convention, of course, provides the strongest support.

Donnellan seems to have been vindicated. Russell's analysis appears, at best, incomplete.

### 3.4 The Gödelian Approach

The dedicated Russellian does, however, have a final refuge: Gödel. While glossing over his slingshot argument,<sup>75</sup> Gödel (1944) made passing reference to formulas such as:

1.  $(\iota x)(Fx \ \& \ x = a)$ .

In this formula, the iota-operator's matrix contains the constituent  $\ulcorner x = a \urcorner$ . Let  $\ulcorner t \urcorner$  and  $\ulcorner v \urcorner$  stand for terms. When a formula exemplifying the form  $\ulcorner v = t \urcorner$  appears in the matrix of a restricted quantifier whose constituent determiner binds  $\ulcorner v \urcorner$ , we will call it a 'Gödelian completion'. Working within the confines of **QT**, Neale (2004, 2005b) attempts to explain referential usage of descriptions in terms of Gödelian completions. These efforts constitute the Gödelian approach.

#### 3.4.1 Referential Uses as Incomplete Gödelian Uses

Now, most referentially used descriptions are incomplete.<sup>76</sup> In such cases, Neale (2004, 2005b) maintains that the incomplete usage admits of an **obvious** Gödelian 'completion'.<sup>77</sup> Where **S** uses the incomplete definite description  $\ulcorner \text{the } F \urcorner$  to target  $\ulcorner a \urcorner$ , **S**'s utterance is elliptical for  $\ulcorner \text{the } F \text{ identical to } a \urcorner$ . On the explicit approach, when Sally uses 'the murderer' to target Jones in an assertive utterance of 'the murderer is insane',

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<sup>75</sup> For details, see Neale (1995, 2000a).

<sup>76</sup> See Bach (2006) and Devitt (2006).

<sup>77</sup> See Ludlow and Neale (2006) as well.

her utterance is elliptical for an assertive utterance of ‘the murderer identical to Jones is insane’. The latter utterance **expresses** the general proposition:

2. [The  $x$ : murderer  $x$  &  $x = Jones$ ] (insane  $x$ ).<sup>78</sup>

Neale does not explicitly discuss indefinite descriptions. However, his analysis naturally extends to them. Where **S** uses the incomplete indefinite description ‘an  $F$ ’ to target ‘ $a$ ’, **S**’s utterance is elliptical for ‘an  $F$  identical to  $a$ ’. Accordingly, when Sally uses ‘a murderer’ to target Jones in an assertive utterance of ‘a murderer is insane’, her utterance is elliptical for an assertive utterance of ‘a murderer identical to Jones is insane’. This utterance **expresses** the general proposition:

3. [An  $x$ : murderer  $x$  &  $x = Jones$ ] (insane  $x$ ).

On the Gödelian approach, assertive utterances of sentence-tokens containing referential uses of incomplete descriptions are treated as elliptical utterances of sentence-tokens that **express** general propositions containing the ‘referent’ of the referential use of the description.<sup>79</sup> Accordingly, a speaker can use such a description to ‘refer’ to an individual and say something about the individual. The speaker succeeds because, in referential cases, the intended ‘referent’ is a constituent of the proposition expressed. However, the individual is not a logical subject of that proposition. Thus, referential uses of incomplete descriptions conform to Russell’s account.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, Neale tells us that:

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<sup>78</sup> In a similar vein, Neale (1990) provides an analysis of appositive uses of definite descriptions. On this account, an assertive utterance of ‘John Smith, the man who threw strawberry ice cream at the Pope, was arrested’ expresses [The  $x$ : man-who-threw-strawberry-ice-cream-at-the-Pope  $x$  &  $x = John\ Smith$ ] (arrested  $x$ ).

<sup>79</sup> Here’s Neale:

As Russell might put it, the denotation of ‘the  $\phi$ ’ gets into the proposition expressed as part of its meaning! (2005b: 849).

<sup>80</sup> **L&L** seemed to be on the verge of the Gödelian approach:

When a description is used referentially it is being used in such a way that there is an obvious Gödelian completion (whether the description actually needs one or not). (2004: 172).

Descriptions are Russellian, and the phenomenon of referential usage is a special case of the phenomenon of incompleteness. (2004: 173).

In this way, the Gödelian approach can extend rather congenially to referential uses of descriptions *simpliciter*.

Accordingly, Neale no longer views referential usage of descriptions simply as an extra-semantic phenomenon amenable to a GCI account. Donnellan's distinction is not necessarily pragmatic:

The discussion in *Descriptions* was, I think, rather lazy...I still think the Russellian analysis is basically correct for both attributive and referential uses of descriptions; but I no longer think the difference between **saying** and **meaning** lies at the heart of a characterization of referential usage. (2004: 106). (His emphasis).

Neale now takes referential usage to be truth-conditionally significant.<sup>81</sup> In our misdescription cases, for example, the propositions expressed are false; the 'referents' lack the properties the restricted nominals denote. Their semantical significance,

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On [our] view, complex demonstratives function like definite descriptions with nominals that contain a directly referring term; it is a small step to suggest that at least some so-called referential uses of definite descriptions (Donnellan 1966), whose nominals are not uniquely satisfied, are intended to be understood as completed by a demonstrative term picking out the object the speaker intends to be talking about (though not, strictly speaking, part of their semantics). (2000: 216, fn. 24).

In a somewhat similar manner, Wilson tells us that:

An utterance of an instance of 'The  $\phi$  is  $\psi$ ', where 'The  $\phi$ ' is used referentially, expresses a different proposition – has different truth conditions – than does a similar utterance in which 'The  $\phi$ ' is used attributively. How this could be so, however, is somewhat puzzling because, as Donnellan points out, it seems implausible to suppose that the meaning of any of the uttered words has changed and there is no obvious syntactical ambiguity. I believe that the puzzle is to be resolved as it was when dealing with instances of 'A(n)  $\phi$  is  $\psi$ '. The meaning of the form of the words 'The  $\phi$  is  $\psi$ ' is the same in attributive and referential uses and the difference in what is said is explained by the difference in the meaning of the prefixes which are understood in the different uses. 'Anything which is ['The  $\phi$ ]...' and '**That thing** which is ['The  $\phi$ ]...' do not have the same sense. (1978: 65). (His emphasis).

<sup>81</sup> See Neale (2004: 171 – 173).

however, does not repudiate Russell. On the Gödelian approach, the articles remain univocal quantifier determiners; descriptions retain their status as general terms. As Neale explains, referential usage is a special case of incomplete quantificational usage.

Referential usage is **special** in virtue of its conventional status. Neale (2005b) suggests that referential uses of (incomplete) descriptions are, as a matter of **implicit convention**, ‘Gödelian descriptions’; they are elliptical uses of descriptions whose matrices contain Gödelian completions. It is no surprise, then, that referential usage, that is, Gödelian usage, is a conventional feature of English. Thus, the argument from convention leaves the Gödelian approach unscathed. In fact, the Gödelian approach seems to explain the conventional status of referential usage.<sup>82</sup>

The Russellian-Gödelian, however, is left with a kind of ambiguity.<sup>83</sup> On the Gödelian approach, there is a convention to supplement referential uses of descriptions with Gödelian completions. The attributive use of descriptions does not participate in this convention. Rather, when required, attributive uses of descriptions are supplemented by further nominals. So, we seem to have two conventions. One appears to pertain to referential uses of descriptions; a second seems to pertain to attributive uses of descriptions. Both uses yield general propositions. But, each use participates in a separate convention. Thus, the Russellian-Gödelian, like the ambiguity theorist, is waist

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<sup>82</sup> See Neale (2004: 173 – 174) and Ludlow and Neale (2006).

<sup>83</sup> Buchanan and Ostertag explain:

It must be said that, other things being equal, we would prefer a single meaning-rule for (1) [i.e. ‘The F is G’]. Since  $R_3$  [i.e. Utter ‘The F is G’ only if, for some object ‘ $o$ ’, you wish to say that ‘[The  $x$ :  $Fx \ \& \ x = o$ ] (G $x$ )’.] cannot claim to be **the** meaning rule for (1) – ...it would fail miserably as an explication of its attributive use – the advocate of  $R_3$  must acknowledge a separate rule for the attributive case. While both rules will be broadly Russellian, this does not mitigate the fact that the theorist thereby espouses an ambiguity. (2005: 895). (Their emphasis). See also Devitt (2006a).

high in ambiguity. Unlike the ambiguity theorist, however, the Russellian-Gödelian does not postulate a lexical ambiguity.<sup>84</sup> In this light, the Russellian-Gödelian might, perhaps, charitably reassess Donnellan's discussion of 'pragmatic ambiguity'.

So, the referential use of descriptions is not assimilated to the referential use of uncontroversial quantifier phrases like 'most philosophers'. The Russellian-Gödelian, thereby, circumvents the problems that linkage drags along. In this respect, the Gödelian approach, like **AT**, is preferable to the pragmatic approach. Unlike **AT**, however, the Gödelian approach invites the charge that the articles become *sui generis*. They, unlike their quantificational brethren, participate in a Gödelian convention.

From the Gödelian perspective, referential usage inside conditionals admits of a plausible explanation. Such usage is elliptical for uses of fuller Gödelian descriptions. There is no reason to suppose that elliptical utterances cannot appear inside conditionals. Trivially, then, our conditionals become unproblematic for the Russellian-Gödelian. An utterance of 'If the murderer is insane, then he will receive psychological counseling' is elliptical for:

4. If [the murderer **identical to Jones**]<sup>1</sup> is insane, then [he]<sub>1</sub> will receive psychological counseling.

An utterance of (4) expresses a general proposition. The general proposition contains Jones as a constituent. Referential uses of descriptions inside conditionals are no longer problematic.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> In this respect, Neale's account of Donnellan's distinction is quite close to Recanati's (1989b, 1993).

<sup>85</sup> Carston (1988) provides a similar treatment of utterances of conditionals containing 'and' within their antecedents.

Furthermore, the Russellian-Gödelian is untroubled by speaker ignorance. In such cases, the ignorant speaker has access to an obvious Gödelian ‘completion’. Sally utters ‘the murderer is here’. Jones’s appearance prompts her referential usage of ‘the murderer’. Her utterance, then, invites the Gödelian completion ‘identical to Jones’. Sally’s ignorance seems unable to block this modest invitation.

Finally, the Gödelian approach allows for reconciliation between the dedicated Russellian and the ambiguity theorist.<sup>86</sup> The dedicated Russellian can continue to maintain that the articles are univocal quantifier determiners; the ambiguity theorist can, at the same time, continue to maintain that referential usage is conventional and that the propositions expressed contain the descriptions’ ‘referents’ as constituents. On the Gödelian approach, then, the debate between Russellians and ambiguity theorists dissolves.<sup>87</sup>

### *3.4.2 Assessing the Gödelian Approach*

For all its initial plausibility, the Gödelian approach suffers from three problems. First, the Gödelian approach erroneously entails the elimination of all singular terms. Second, it seems psychologically implausible. And, finally, the Gödelian approach is only Russellian in form; it is not Russellian in spirit. The ambiguity theorist, on the other hand, avoids the first two problems and doesn’t face the embarrassment associated with the third. Consequently, a rejection of the Gödelian approach and **QT** in favor of **AT** seems extremely compelling.

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<sup>86</sup> See Neale (2004: 172) and Neale (2005b: 849).

<sup>87</sup> See Neale (2004: 71, 106). Ludlow and Neale (2006) claim that this, in essence, amounts to a **synthesis** between **QT** and **AT**. Devitt (2006a) has a different take.

Schiffer's (1995, 2005) Pergola case illuminates the first problem. The APA has invited Pergola to present **the** solution to the mind-body problem. Pergola's name is announced. Dropping his lecture notes along the way, Pergola stumbles to the podium. He slurs through his lecture in a most incoherent fashion. Disgusted by his behavior, Sally says 'the man is drunk'. She uses 'the man' referentially to target Pergola. On the Gödelian approach, then, Sally utterance expresses:

5. [The  $x$ : man  $x$  &  $x = Pergola$ ] (drunk  $x$ ).

Obviously, Sally could have uttered 'he is drunk' or 'that man is drunk' instead. In these cases, Sally's communicative intention would remain stable. The Russellian-Gödelian typically holds that psychological facts alone determine meaning.<sup>88</sup> So, significantly similar communicative intentions produce significantly similar semantic contents. The Pergola case, then, seems to force the Russellian-Gödelian to assimilate deictic pronouns and complex demonstratives to general terms.<sup>89</sup>

Neale embraces this consequence. On the Gödelian approach, singular deictic pronouns like 'he', 'she', and 'it' are viewed as quantifier determiners, namely variations on 'the'.<sup>90</sup> The pronouns select phonologically null **NP** complements. So, for example, the syntactic structure of 'he' is:

6. [<sub>DP</sub> He [<sub>NP</sub>  $e$ ]]

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<sup>88</sup> See Neale (2004).

<sup>89</sup> Notice, of course, that this problem only extends to Russellian-Gödelians that, like Neale (2004), hold that psychological facts alone determine meaning. If one drops that assumption than Schiffer's criticism loses its force. Still, it's rather unlikely that the current lot of Russellian-Gödelians will make such a desperate move.

<sup>90</sup> This position has an impressive tradition. See Postal (1969), Abney (1987), Heim and Kratzer (1998), Elbourne (2001), Neale (2004, 2005a).

At the semantic level, ‘*e*’ contributes a Gödelian completion.<sup>91</sup> Now, if gender makes a truth-functional contribution, then an utterance of ‘he is drunk’, where ‘he’ is used deictically to target Pergola, expresses:

7. [The  $x$ : male  $x$  &  $x = Pergola$ ] (drunk  $x$ ).

If not, then we arrive at:

8. [The  $x$ :  $x = Pergola$ ] (drunk  $x$ ).

Neale maintains neutrality between (7) and (8).<sup>92</sup> On either formulation, however, his basic point obtains. Singular deictic pronouns denote the DEF. function. Utterances of ‘he is drunk’ and ‘the man is drunk’ express general propositions.

Neale assimilates complex demonstratives to indefinite descriptions. According to Neale, complex demonstratives are indefinite descriptions that are **naturally** Gödelian. When *S* uses ‘that’, *S* signals reference as a matter of semantic convention. Where *S*’s use of ‘that’ demonstrates Pergola, an assertive utterance of ‘that man is drunk’ expresses:

9. [An  $x$ : man  $x$  &  $x = Pergola$ ] (drunk  $x$ ).

Thus, we have another general proposition.

<sup>91</sup> Generalizing ideas found in Kripke (1973), Neale (2004, 2005a) utilizes ‘Gödelian’ completions to provide a uniform treatment of third person singular pronouns. We have already seen Neale’s treatment of deictic pronouns. Unbound and ‘bound’ anaphoric singular pronouns whose antecedents are quantifier phrases exemplifying the form  $\lceil [Q y: Fy] \rceil$  have the form  $\lceil [the x: x = y] \rceil$ . Anaphoric pronouns whose antecedents are proper names have the form  $\lceil [the x: x = name] \rceil$ , where  $\lceil name \rceil$  represents the bearer of the name. Analogously, definite descriptions that are anaphoric on names have the form  $\lceil [the x: Fx \& x = name] \rceil$ . Whether such a view can carry over to plural third person pronouns or pronouns with disjunctive antecedents is an open question. Nonetheless, the proposal is as interesting as it is elegant. And, as Neale makes clear, the reformulation it imposes on Binding theory is harmless enough to make its pursuit a serious enterprise. For his part, Kripke rejects this ‘Gödelian’ approach; he claims it cannot handle pronominal contradiction. For a previous discussion, see 2.4.2.

<sup>92</sup> Schiffer (2005) discusses some problems associated with allowing gender to make a truth-functional contribution.

Despite Neale's optimistic embrace of this 'seeming madness', there is a problem. As Schiffer (2005) observes, a descriptive-based analysis of deictic pronouns and complex demonstratives quickly slides into an elimination of all singular terms. Consider Pergola again. Suppose that Sally had said 'Pergola is drunk'. Sally's communicative intentions remain unchanging. On the Gödelian approach, then, Sally's utterance expresses either:

10. [An  $x$ :  $x = Pergola$ ] (drunk  $x$ ), or

11. [The  $x$ :  $x = Pergola$ ] (drunk  $x$ ).<sup>93</sup>

The assimilation of simple demonstratives to general terms is also easy to visualize. Instead of using 'the table' referentially to target  $a$ , Sally uses the simple demonstrative 'this' or 'that'.

The Gödelian approach, then, entails a Russellian account of grammatical subjects that even Russell would have found objectionable.<sup>94</sup> All ostensible singular terms are, at bottom, general terms, namely descriptions. Surely, this Russellian extreme is bound to have difficulties. Here are three. First, proper names, deictic pronouns, and demonstratives generally lack the scopal properties uncontroversial quantifier phrases have.<sup>95</sup> If these terms are really quantifier phrases, then an utterance of 'It/that/that F

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<sup>93</sup> In the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein tells us that  $Fa$  is equivalent to  $(\exists x)(Fx \ \& \ x=a)$ . (5.441, 5.47). Quine (1970) assimilates  $Fa$  to  $(\iota x)(Fx \ \& \ x=a)$ . Recently, Soames (2002, 2005) has assimilated 'descriptive' proper name, like 'Senator Clinton', to 'Gödelian' descriptions. On his account, 'Senator Clinton' has the logical form: [The  $x$ : senator  $x$  &  $x = Clinton$ ].

<sup>94</sup> Russell consistently held that the simple demonstratives 'this' and 'that' were singular terms. See 2.1.1, fn. 8.

<sup>95</sup> Consider (vii):

(vii). Every driver knows that mechanic working for him.

Neale notes that complex demonstratives:

Must have large scope with respect to attitude frames, and from the point of view of implementation it is simplest (perhaps even mandatory) to view them as taking large scope quite

might not be  $G^1$  should easily lend itself to six possible readings. But it doesn't. Rather, the singular terms are conventionally interpreted outside the scope of 'might' and 'not'. The Russellian-Gödelian must explain this disparity.<sup>96</sup> Second, as Schiffer notes, the Russellian-Gödelian robs himself of the very terminology he needs to explicitly state the singular thoughts conveyed by referential uses of ostensible singular terms.<sup>97</sup> Finally, the relationship between surface form and logical form becomes very strained. All ostensible singular terms contain, at logical form, Gödelian completions as matrices; at surface form, however, such matrices are noticeably absent. The Russellian-Gödelian owes us an account of the mechanisms that generate a definite description containing a Gödelian completion from syntactically simple constituents like proper names and syntactically complex constituents such as complex demonstratives. Such accounts, I imagine, are not in the offing.

The ambiguity theorist, in contrast, avoids this extreme Russellianism. Assuming Sally's communicative intentions are stable in each case, the ambiguity theorist holds that descriptions function as singular terms. This allows the ambiguity theorist to continue to treat deictic pronouns, demonstratives, and proper names as singular terms. Within **AT**, the set of singular terms welcomes new members. No elimination transpires. The

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generally. This might in turn be used to explain the fact that 'every driver' cannot bind a variable inside 'that mechanic working for him' in example [(vii)]. (1993c: 108).

<sup>96</sup> Gary Ostertag suggests (p.c) that the Russellian-Gödelian might explain this disparity by maintaining that Gödelian completions 'obliterate' the scopal properties of quantifiers. It is not clear, however, why they should do so.

<sup>97</sup> According to Schiffer:

This is especially problematic if we think in a neural system of mental representations, a language of thought. If Mentalese is to have formulae that directly express the contents we think, it will need genuine singular terms. And what a mystery it would be if Mentalese singular terms could not have public language counterparts. (2005: 1178).

ambiguity theorist, thus, avoids entanglement with the problems the Russellian-Gödelian inherits. Here, **AT** provides a better methodological and conceptual alternative.

The Russellian-Gödelian is also wedded to the view that all referential uses of incomplete descriptions involve intricate applications of identity. As we have observed, ordinary speakers regularly use incomplete descriptions referentially. Now, on the explicit approach, a speaker expresses  $\ulcorner p \urcorner$  by his elliptical utterance of  $\ulcorner s \urcorner$  just in case the speaker intends his audience to entertain  $\ulcorner p \urcorner$  by recognizing his intention that they entertain  $\ulcorner p \urcorner$  on the basis of his utterance. Successful communication, then, requires that the speaker also entertain  $\ulcorner p \urcorner$ . On the Gödelian approach, an ordinary speaker must intend for his audience to entertain a general proposition that invokes identity when he uses an incomplete description referentially. Furthermore, the speaker must also entertain that proposition.<sup>98</sup> The proposition in question, however, is highly sophisticated. And Schiffer's skepticism regarding the intellectual capacity of ordinary speakers, like, say, young children and undereducated adults, to entertain such propositions seem entirely warranted.

Sally's five year old, Sarah, is at the beach. After a quick dip in the Atlantic Ocean, Sarah reports that 'the ocean is cold'. She uses 'the ocean' referentially. The Russellian-Gödelian, then, holds that Sarah's utterance expresses:

12. [The  $x$ : ocean  $x$  &  $x = Atlantic\ Ocean$ ] (cold  $x$ ).

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<sup>98</sup> The Gödelian approach, remember, is within the explicit approach tradition. Thus, the Gödelian approach inherits the explicit approach's flaws. For example, there is no principled basis for determining whether the speaker's utterance of 'the murderer' is elliptical for 'the murderer identical to Jones' or 'the tall murderer identical to Jones'. Consequently, the specter of indeterminacy still looms large. See Schiffer (2005) and Buchanan and Ostertag (2005) for further discussion.

Thus, Sarah must entertain this proposition and intend for Sally to entertain it by recognizing Sarah's intention that Sally do so on the basis of Sarah's elliptical utterance. Such an analysis surely over-intellectualizes matters. An ordinary speaker that is prompted to be more 'explicit' would hardly resort to a that-clause that employs identity. *Prima facie*, the Gödelian approach **seems** too intellectually sophisticated to serve as a psychologically plausible account of referential usage. The Russellian-Gödelian is obligated to show otherwise.

The ambiguity theorist does not inherit this strenuous obligation. Within **AT**, such sophisticated thoughts are not ascribed to folks that use descriptions referentially. The thought the ambiguity theorist ascribes to the speaker is much more pedestrian. As usual, this turns out to be a virtue.

Finally, the Russellian-Gödelian **is not actually Russellian** in any robust sense. Remember, a referential use of 'the F' to target 'a' in an utterance of the 'The F is G' expresses:

13. [The  $x$ :  $Fx \ \& \ x = a$ ] ( $Gx$ ).

On the other hand, a referential use of 'an F' to target 'a' in an utterance of the 'An F is G' expresses:

14. [An  $x$ :  $Fx \ \& \ x = a$ ] ( $Gx$ ).

Now, (13) and (14) are logically equivalent to a conjunction of two singular propositions:

15.  $\langle\langle a, F \rangle, \langle a, G \rangle\rangle$  CONJ.

As Devitt (2006a) observes, the Gödelian approach fails to provide a non-superficial general proposition; it fails to provide an analysis that is semantically Russellian as

opposed to syntactically so.<sup>99</sup> Neale explained earlier, a Gödelian-style approach hardly retains the Russellian spirit:

Saying that a Russellian description ‘[The  $x$ :  $Rbx$ ]’ may contain a referential component ‘ $b$ ’ is very different from saying that the description is referential (in the intended sense) **as long as  $R$  is not the identity relation**. A phrase of the form ‘[The  $x$ :  $x = b$ ]’ is technically a Russellian definite description; but the claim that referential uses of descriptions do not require distinctive non-Russellian interpretations would indeed be hollow if the Russellian position could be maintained only by employing the identity relation to concoct descriptions of this form (e.g., ‘[The  $x$ :  $x = that$ ]’). (1990: 115, fn. 53). (His emphasis).

In view of the logical equivalence of (13), (14), and (15), the Gödelian approach does indeed appear hollow. The fact that a Russellian about ordinary proper names could employ the same tactic further magnifies its hollowness. After all, the Russellian-Gödelian might rebuff Kripke (1972) by concocting descriptions of the form ‘[The  $x$ :  $x = Name$ ]’. Hollow indeed!

**AT**, on the other hand, is not hollow. Nor is it psychologically implausible. Nor is it eliminativist. And, as we have seen, **AT** provides numerous empirical, methodological, and conceptual advantages. Thus, we have compelling grounds for postulating an ambiguity among the articles. As such, we adopt **AT**.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> The Russellian-Gödelian has a further problem. Sally and Mary are at a party. Across from them, Bertrand Russell and A.N. Whitehead are discussing football. Russell is drinking a beer, Whitehead, a glass of wine. Referring to Russell, Sally turns to Mary and says:

(viii). The author of *Principia Mathematica* is drinking a beer.

According to the Russellian-Gödelian, Sally’s utterance is shorthand for an utterance of ‘the author of *Principia Mathematica* identical to Russell is drinking a beer’. Sally, then, expresses (ix):

(ix). [The  $x$ : author ( $x$ , *Principia Mathematica*) &  $x = Russell$ ] ([A  $y$ : beer  $y$ ] (drinking ( $x$ ,  $y$ ))).

In this situation, (ix) is certainly true. Thus, according to the Russellian-Gödelian, Sally says something true. Now, it has been a basic Russellian intuition that an utterance of (viii) expresses a false proposition. As such, it remains unclear whether the Gödelian approach could be construed as ‘Russellian’ in any serious sense. For further details, see Pupa (2007). For a response, see Neale (2007).

<sup>100</sup> At this point, one might want to ask the following question: what is the nature of the ambiguity postulated? Is it homonymy? Is it polysemy? Is it something else? We think it is safe to say that the ambiguity is not homonymy. It is no mere coincidence that the articles are ambiguous in the manner the ambiguity theorist holds them to be. Does that mean that the ambiguity is a form of polysemy? Maybe.

Given our compelling grounds, our adoption does not constitute ‘the lazy man’s approach in philosophy’.<sup>101</sup> Actually, our adoption requires diligence; we must provide the semantics of the referential articles and determine how they contrast. This is not a lazy man’s task.

### 3.5 Conclusions

The chapter began with a presentation of Donnellan’s distinction. Next, we introduced **AT**. Two Russellian approaches to Donnellan’s distinction were then introduced: the pragmatic approach and the Gödelian approach. First, we focused upon the former. We presented the pragmatic approach and some of its supporting arguments. Afterwards, we criticized those arguments. During that process, we introduced **RT**. Ultimately, we witnessed the collapse of the pragmatic approach and **RT**. These collapses provided a very strong case in favor of **AT**. Next, we presented the Gödelian approach and some benefits associated with it. Afterwards, we argued that the Gödelian approach ultimately failed too. Its failure strengthened the case for **AT**. We observed that **AT** succeeded everywhere **QT** or **RT** failed. Consequently, we adopted **AT**.

We now move to the arduous task of providing the referential semantics of the articles.

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There seems to be a tight conceptual link between referential and attributive usage. Polysemy, however, doesn’t seem right. Polysemy applies chiefly to predicates. Predicates are **open** expressions. From a theoretical perspective, there are no serious restrictions on the kind or number of predicates one can introduce into a natural language. And, so, metaphorically, the conceptual links between polysemous predicates might spread out in any number of ways. Determiners, however, are **closed** expressions. There is a severe restriction on the kind and number of determiners one can introduce into a natural language. We are, therefore, tentatively and hesitantly, inclined to think that this ambiguity is special. Like polysemy, there is a tight conceptual link between the distinct meanings; but, unlike polysemy, the ambiguity respects the closed nature of the articles. The conceptual links cannot spread out in the same fluid manner as they do with predicates. We might call this special ambiguity ‘dolysemy’. For a defense of the polysemous nature of the ambiguity, see Amaral (2007).

<sup>101</sup> See Kripke (1979b).

## **Chapter 4**

### **Novelty and Familiarity: The Referential Articles and Their Character**

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#### **4.0 Introduction**

Last chapter centered upon Donnellan's distinction. In light of Donnellan's distinction, we rejected Russell's unitary account of the articles. In its place, we adopted the ambiguity thesis. Naturally, this adoption carries certain obligations. Most pressing, it obliges one to provide the semantics of the referential articles. In chapter 4, we fulfill this obligation. The semantics of the referential articles, we argue, finds its home within the familiarity theory of definiteness. In short, referential definite descriptions refer to 'familiar' referents; referential indefinite descriptions refer to 'novel' ones. Accordingly, the referential articles also form a semantic contrast set. With the semantics of the referential articles in place, we arrive at a complete account of the indefinite/definite contrast.

Chapter 4 begins with a complication. In 4.1, referential articles, we discover, are context-sensitive. With this discovery, we turn to Kaplan. In 4.2, we explicate Kaplan's content/character distinction. Kaplan's content/character distinction, we maintain, provides the necessary tools for presenting the semantics of context-sensitive expressions. Putting Kaplan's distinction to work, we move, in 4.3, to present the semantics of the referential articles. Our account, as we shall see, is embedded in two traditions: the familiarity theory of definiteness and the causal theory of reference. Finally, in 4.4, we turn our attention to the nominal and its semantic contribution in referential contexts. Here, we argue that the nominal makes a 'minimal' contribution. In referential contexts, the nominal neither contributes a property to the proposition expressed nor filters reference; rather, it provides what we label a 'supposition'.

## 4.1 A Complication: Context-Sensitivity

### 4.1.1 *English and English\**

The ambiguity thesis (**AT**, hereafter) states that the articles are ambiguous. The articles have two meanings: one quantificational, another referential. Within **AT**, then, a proper disambiguation of English, 'English\*', contains four articles. Let ' $x_Q$ ' mean ' $x$  belongs to the category of quantificational determiners'; let ' $x_R$ ' stand for ' $x$  belongs to the category of referential determiners'. **AT** entails that English\* contains ' $a_Q$ ', ' $the_Q$ ', ' $a_R$ ', and ' $the_R$ '. Thus, the ambiguity theorist is obligated to provide the semantics for each article of English\*.

Russell provides the ambiguity theorist with the semantics for ' $a_Q$ ' and ' $the_Q$ '.<sup>1</sup> In English\*, ' $a_Q$ ' denotes the INDEF. function; ' $the_Q$ ' denotes the DEF. function.<sup>2</sup> In English\*, ' $\lceil a_Q F \rceil$ ' and ' $\lceil the_Q F \rceil$ ' are quantifier phrases. Naturally, quantificational descriptions have all the properties we associate with quantifier phrases. Utterances of sentence-tokens exemplifying (1) and (2) express general propositions:

1. ' $\lceil An_Q F \text{ is } G \rceil$ '.
2. ' $\lceil The_Q F \text{ is } G \rceil$ '.

Such utterances express propositions even when the description-tokens they contain are empty. **A** can understand **S**'s utterances of (1) and (2) even if **A** is causally isolated from the individuals the quantificational descriptions currently designate. Quantificational descriptions, in some cases, trigger scopal ambiguity. And, finally, quantificational descriptions are, for the most part, nonrigid designators.

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<sup>1</sup> Even if he can be taken to endorse some version of **AT**, Donnellan (1966) never explicitly endorses Russell's semantics for attributive uses.

<sup>2</sup> See 2.2.1 for details.

Furthermore, {‘a<sub>Q</sub>’, ‘the<sub>Q</sub>’} compose a semantic contrast set.<sup>3</sup> The quantificational articles are non-synonymous members of the same semantic category. The quantificational articles contrast solely in terms of uniqueness. Thus, the proposition expressed by an utterance of a sentence-token exemplifying (2) entails the proposition expressed by an utterance of a sentence-token exemplifying (1). However, the proposition expressed by an utterance of a sentence-token exemplifying (1) does not entail the proposition expressed by an utterance of a sentence-token exemplifying (2). As a consequence, <‘the<sub>Q</sub>’, ‘a<sub>Q</sub>’> constitutes a Horn scale.<sup>4</sup>

Although incomplete, Russell’s account has proven useful. The ambiguity theorist identifies the semantics of English\*’s quantificational articles with Russell’s unitary analysis of English’s articles. The ambiguity theorist has only one task left. He must provide the semantics for English\*’s referential articles. This task, however, involves a certain complication: context-sensitivity.

#### 4.1.2 Context-Sensitivity

For our purposes, a simple expression is context-sensitive just in case its tokens can, in identical syntactic environments, make different semantic contributions to what is expressed in different contexts. A simple expression is context-insensitive *iff* it is not context-sensitive. A complex expression is context-sensitive whenever at least some of

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<sup>3</sup> A semantic contrast set, remember, is this:

**(D<sub>4</sub>) Semantic Contrast Set.**  $|\Gamma| \geq 2$  and  $\Gamma$ ’s members satisfy the lexical restriction, aboutness restriction, and non-synonymy restriction.

For further details, see 1.2.2 and 2.2.1.

<sup>4</sup> Here, once again, is our definition of a Horn Scale:

**(D<sub>3</sub>) Horn Scale.** An ordered tuple  $\langle \alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_n, \beta \rangle$  is a Horn scale *iff*  $\langle \alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_n, \beta \rangle$  satisfies the lexical restriction, aboutness restriction, and entailment restriction.

For further details, see 1.2.1 and 2.2.1.

its parts are context-sensitive. Thus, a complex expression is context-insensitive *iff* all its parts are context-insensitive.

English is littered with context-sensitive expressions. Consider the sentence:

3. I am tired today.

The sentence contains two simple context-sensitive expressions: ‘I’ and ‘today’. Within different contexts, the tokens of these expressions can make distinct semantic contributions even though they appear in identical syntactic environments. Take  $C_1$  and  $C_2$ :

$C_1$ : **Producer** – Sally; **Date** – February 6, 2007.<sup>5</sup>

$C_2$ : **Producer** – Mary; **Date** – February 7, 2007.

In  $C_1$ , Sally’s utterance of a token of (3) expresses:

4. On February 6, 2007: <Sally, Tired>.

While, in  $C_2$ , Mary’s utterance of a token of (3) expresses:

5. On February 7, 2007: <Mary, Tired>.

Relative to  $C_1$ , the ‘I’-token contributes Sally; the ‘today’-token contributes February 6, 2007. Relative to  $C_2$ , however, the ‘I’-token contributes Mary, while the ‘today’-token contributes February 7, 2007.

English also contains numerous context-insensitive expressions. For example, ‘tired’ is a simple context-insensitive expression. Irrespective of context, its tokens make, when in the same syntactic environment, the same semantic contribution to what is expressed. In both  $C_1$  and  $C_2$ , ‘tired’-tokens contribute the TIRED property.

Since (3) contains two context-sensitive expressions, it too is context-sensitive. As one can observe, in different contexts, utterances of tokens of (1) express distinct

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<sup>5</sup> The term ‘producer’ covers both speakers and writers; the dates are relativized to Eastern Standard Time.

propositions; they make distinct semantic contributions to what is expressed. Quine's (1970) eternal sentences, those 'sentences' that stay forever true or forever false independently of contextual circumstances, are complex expressions that are context-insensitive. Consider the eternal sentence:

6. On February 6, 2007, Sally, tired.

In any context, an utterance of a token of (6) expresses the same proposition, namely (4) (i.e. On February 6, 2007: <Sally, Tired>). The sentence, then, is context-insensitive; all its parts are context-insensitive.<sup>6</sup>

Now, quantificational descriptions and referential descriptions diverge in terms of context-sensitivity in cases where their respective nominals are context-insensitive. In these cases, quantificational descriptions are context-insensitive. In every context, an utterance of a token exemplifying  $\lceil \text{an}_Q F \rceil$  makes the same semantic contribution; the same holds for utterances of tokens exemplifying  $\lceil \text{the}_Q F \rceil$ . Of course, quantificational descriptions are complex expressions. From a compositional perspective, then, the quantificational articles are also context-insensitive. Referential descriptions, on the other hand, are context-sensitive. In one context, Sally might use a token of 'a<sub>R</sub> murderer' or 'the<sub>R</sub> murderer' to refer to Jones. Relative to this context, the tokens contribute Jones to what is expressed. In another context, Sally might use tokens of those same descriptions to refer to Bill. Here, the tokens contribute Bill. We arrive at context-sensitivity. Referential descriptions, like their quantificational brethren, are complex

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<sup>6</sup> In (6), no tense marker connects 'Sally' and 'tired'. The reason for such an omission is rather intriguing. If (6) is put in the past tense, then an utterance of it prior to or on February 6, 2007 would be downright infelicitous, perhaps so much so that the utterance would fail to express a proposition. If, on the other hand, (6) is put in the future tense, then an utterance of it after or on February 6, 2007 would also be downright infelicitous. And, finally, if left in the present tense, any utterance of (6) before or after February 6, 2007 would carry the same results.

expressions. Nominals, we are stipulating, are context-insensitive. So, referential descriptions receive their context-sensitivity from the referential articles. The referential articles are context-sensitive.

Semanticists can handle simple context-insensitive expressions in a relatively straightforward manner. Since the tokens of such expressions make the same semantic contribution irrespective of context, the semanticist can identify the meaning of a context-insensitive expression with the semantic contribution its token makes to what is expressed. So, for example, the meaning of 'tired' is simply the TIRED property. Similarly, the semantics of the quantificational articles are just those functions their tokens always contribute to what is expressed. Of course, the tokens of context-sensitive expressions fail to make the same semantic contribution in every context. Thus, the semanticist cannot identify their meanings with the contributions their tokens always make. No such contribution exists. Context-sensitive expressions demand a different tactic.

The different tactic is an obvious one. The semanticist identifies the meanings of context-sensitive expressions not simply in terms of **what** their tokens contribute to what is expressed but rather in terms of **how** the contributions are made. Naturally, then, context-sensitivity leads us to Kaplan's content/character distinction. Following Kaplan, we shall maintain that the semanticist must identify the meaning of a context-sensitive expression with its character.

## 4.2 Content and Character

### 4.2.1 The Content/Character Distinction

But what exactly is Kaplan's content/character distinction? In order to answer this question, some symbolism is in order. Let  $\langle u \rangle$  represent an utterance,  $\langle e \rangle$  an expression,  $\langle \zeta \rangle$  a token of  $\langle e \rangle$ , and  $\langle \zeta_u \rangle$  an utterance  $\langle u \rangle$  of  $\langle \zeta \rangle$ . For Kaplan (1978b, 1989a, 1989b) content is a property of  $\langle \zeta_u \rangle$ . Specifically, the content of  $\langle \zeta_u \rangle$  in a particular context,  $\langle C \rangle$ , is what  $\langle \zeta_u \rangle$  expresses in  $\langle C \rangle$ . Character, on the other hand, is a property of expressions. The character of an expression  $\langle e \rangle$  is that which determines the content of  $\langle \zeta_u \rangle$  with respect to  $\langle C \rangle$ .

For the most part, the character of  $\langle e \rangle$  coincides with the rule governing its usage. Content, on the other hand, constitutes the semantic value of  $\langle \zeta_u \rangle$ . Thus, if  $\langle e \rangle$  is a declarative sentence, the content of  $\langle \zeta_u \rangle$  is a proposition. If, on the other hand,  $\langle e \rangle$  is a singular term, the content of  $\langle \zeta_u \rangle$  is an individual. Generalizing somewhat, content appears to be a function from a context  $\langle C \rangle$  to the extension of  $\langle e \rangle$ ; character, on the other hand, seems to be a function from context to content.<sup>7</sup> Content, then, is parasitic on character. If a symbol doesn't have a character, utterances of its tokens won't have content.

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<sup>7</sup> As Kaplan (1978b) mentions, Strawson gestures towards this distinction:

Consider another case of an expression which has a uniquely referring use, viz. the expression 'I'; and consider the sentence, 'I am hot'. Countless people may use this same sentence; but it is logically impossible for two different people to make **the same use** of this sentence: or, if this is preferred, to use it to express the same proposition. The expression 'I' may *correctly* be used by (and only by) any one of innumerable people to refer to himself. To say this is to say something about the expression 'I': *it is, in a sense, to give its meaning*. This is the sort of thing that can be said about **expressions**. But it makes no sense to say of the **expression** 'I' that it refers to a particular person. This is the sort of thing that can be said only of a particular use of the expression. (1950: 142). (Strawson's emphasis is in **bold**, mine is in *bold italics*).

According to Kaplan, the character of an expression constitutes its **meaning**. Expressions, we are told, receive their characters from the linguistic conventions of the language community. Thus, **S** is a competent user of 'e' only in so far as **S** knows the character of 'e'. **S** competently uses 'e' just in case he properly participates in the practices of his own language community. Accordingly, character and meaning coincide.<sup>8</sup>

Simple context-sensitive expressions help illuminate the content/character distinction. Consider, once again, the indexical 'I'. Sally utters an 'I'-token. The content of her utterance is an individual, namely Sally. Mary, too, utters an 'I'-token. Here, the utterance has Mary as its content. Thus, utterances of tokens of the same simple expression can have different contents. Notice, however, that 'I' has a univocal character. Roughly speaking, the character of 'I' is **R**<sub>1</sub>:

**R**<sub>1</sub>: The semantic contribution of 'I'-tokens in 'C' is the producer in 'C'.

So, a simple expression can have a univocal character and, nonetheless, speakers can, within the same syntactic environment, use its tokens to express distinct contents in different contexts.

Interestingly, the opposite also holds. Two simple expressions can have different characters and, yet, speakers can, within the same syntactic environment, use their tokens to express identical contents. Mary is speaking. Sally is her attentive audience. At some point, Mary utters a 'you'-token. In this context, Sally constitutes the content of Mary's utterance. Now, Sally's utterance of an 'I'-token has identical content. 'I' and 'you',

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<sup>8</sup> Once again, Strawson (1950) provides an important historical antecedent.

however, have distinct characters. The character of 'I' is, more or less,  $\mathbf{R}_1$ , while the character of 'you' is akin to  $\mathbf{R}_2$ :

$\mathbf{R}_2$ : The semantic contribution of 'you'-tokens in  $\lceil C \rceil$  is the audience in  $\lceil C \rceil$ .<sup>9</sup>

Thus, the same content does not promise the same character; the same character is not obliged to deliver the same content in every context.

Content and character are compositional. Complex content is composed of the content of its parts. The same holds for character. The character of a complex expression is composed of the character of its parts. Predictably, then, complex content and character also diverge in some instances. Take:

7. I am tired.

8. You are tired.

Sally's utterance of a token of (7) expresses (9); Mary's expresses (10):

9.  $\langle \text{Sally, Tired} \rangle$ .

10.  $\langle \text{Mary, Tired} \rangle$ .

Accordingly, Sally and Mary's utterances have distinct contents. Nonetheless, (7) has a univocal character. Now, suppose, once again, that Mary is speaking and Sally is her attentive audience. Relative to this context, Mary's utterance of a token of (8) expresses (9). Thus, Mary's utterance has the same content as Sally's utterance of a token of (7).

However, (7) and (8) have distinct characters. The character of (7), unlike (8), is partially constitutive of  $\mathbf{R}_1$ ; the character of (8), unlike (7), is partially constitutive of  $\mathbf{R}_2$ . Once again, we have distinct contents founded upon equivalent characters and we have identical contents grounded in distinct characters.

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<sup>9</sup> See Fodor and Sag (1982). While his system allows for something akin to  $\mathbf{R}_2$ , Kaplan (1989b: 585 – 587) seems somewhat ambivalent about its plausibility.

There are, of course, utterances of expression-tokens that contribute the same content in all contexts. Kaplan maintains that expressions that produce such tokens have ‘constant’ or ‘fixed’ characters. Eternal sentences are a prime example. Eternal sentences, as we have seen, are those declarative sentences that do not contain any context-sensitive elements at all. Accordingly, utterances of the tokens of eternal sentences will always express the same proposition irrespective of context; each utterance will have the same content in any context. Eternal sentences have constant characters in virtue of their context-insensitivity. In general, context-insensitive expressions have constant characters.

Constant characters provide simplification. When an expression has a constant character, the content of an utterance of one of its tokens will just be the expression’s character. Thus, with context-insensitive expressions, character collapses into content. The semanticist concerned with context-insensitive expressions can ride roughshod over the content/character distinction. The characters of such expressions are simply the content of the utterances of their tokens. Character and content meld together. In such cases, we can overlook the distinction.<sup>10</sup> Here, life becomes somewhat easier.

#### *4.2.2 The Articles and Character*

After introducing the content/character distinction, we immediately identified meaning with character. Appearances notwithstanding, this identification leaves the semantics of the quantificational articles intact. The quantificational articles, remember,

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<sup>10</sup> Discussing the historical antecedents of the content/character distinction, Kaplan remarks: The distinction between character and content was unlikely to be noticed before demonstratives came under consideration, because demonstrative-free expressions have a constant character, i.e., they express the same content in every context. Thus character becomes an uninteresting complication in the theory. (1978b: 139).

are context-insensitive; they have constant characters. For our purposes, then, the unchanging content of the utterances of their tokens constitute their character. Irrespective of context, utterances of ‘a<sub>Q</sub>’-tokens have the INDEF. function for their content. So, the character of ‘a<sub>Q</sub>’ is the INDEF. function. Utterances of ‘the<sub>Q</sub>’-tokens contribute the DEF. function in any context. The character of ‘the<sub>Q</sub>’, then, is the DEF. function. These functions are just what we previously labeled the ‘meanings’ of the quantificational articles. Thus, the quantificational articles retain their meanings despite our identification of meaning with character.

More to the point, the identification of meaning with character enables the semanticist to provide the meaning of context-sensitive expressions. The meanings of context-sensitive expressions are their characters. Thus, the ambiguity theorist can provide the semantics of the referential articles in terms of character. Their semantics will simply be the rules governing their usage. The ambiguity theorist is obligated to provide these rules. Specifically, the ambiguity theorist must provide instructions for deriving the content of an utterance of a referential description-token in any context. We must explain **how** referential descriptions, through their tokens, contribute individuals to what is expressed.

### 4.3 Novel and Familiar Characters

The familiarity theory of definiteness (**FT**, hereafter) provides the path. The familiarity theorist holds either:

- F**<sub>1</sub>: Indefinite description-tokens **refer** to individuals that are novel in  $\lceil C \rceil$ , or
- F**<sub>2</sub>: Definite description-tokens **refer** to individuals that are familiar in  $\lceil C \rceil$ , or
- F**<sub>3</sub>: Both **F**<sub>1</sub> and **F**<sub>2</sub>.

‘Homogeneous’ versions of **FT** subscribe to  $F_3$ . ‘Heterogeneous’ versions of **FT**, on the other hand, reject  $F_3$  in favor of either  $F_1$  exclusively or  $F_2$  exclusively. Now, homogeneous **FT**s treat descriptions as univocal singular terms. The notions of familiarity and novelty are invoked in order to help determine the content of the utterances of description-tokens. In this manner, familiarity theorists provide the character of the articles. Obviously, homogeneous **FT** has much to offer the ambiguity theorist. The ambiguity theorist can incorporate the familiarity theorist’s findings in order to locate the referential articles’ characters. By doing so, the ambiguity theorist can provide a complete semantics for English\*’s articles.

Our discussion of **FT** begins with its modern architect: Christophersen. After discovering Christophersen’s **FT** is heterogeneous, we turn to Strawson’s homogeneous **FT**. With Strawson, we receive a rough formulation of the referential articles’ characters. Subsequently, we call upon the causal theory of reference to smooth over Strawson’s formulation. Within the framework of the causal theory of reference, we provide the characters of the referential articles. Afterwards, we demonstrate that the referential articles compose a semantic contrast set.

#### *4.3.1 FT’s Modern Roots*

##### *4.3.1.1 Christophersen’s Heterogeneous FT*

Christophersen’s (1939) systematic treatment of the definite article marks the modern inception of **FT**.<sup>11</sup> Christophersen held that the semantic contribution of a definite

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<sup>11</sup> **FT** enjoys a long history. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century A.D., Apollonius Dyscolus, a Greek grammarian, made the following remarks:

Perhaps also we might consider the fact that referential pronouns are equivalent to nouns combined with articles [i.e. to definite **NP**’s, not just **N**’s]. For nouns by themselves are not referential, but only when they are accompanied by the {definite} article, whose special function is reference (anaphora). (1981: 27).

description-token is an individual. Definite descriptions, then, are singular terms.<sup>12</sup> For Christophersen, **S**'s utterance of a token exemplifying 'the **F**' refers to the individual in 'C' that **S** and **A** are mutually familiar with as **uniquely** satisfying 'F' in 'C'.

Christophersen explains:

The article 'the' brings it about that to the potential meaning (the idea) of a word [i.e. the nominal] is attached a certain association with previously acquired knowledge, by which it can be inferred that only one definite individual is meant. That is what is understood by 'familiarity'. (1939: 71).<sup>13</sup>

Christophersen also maintains that if **S** uses 'the **F**' to refer to 'o', **A** will understand **S**'s utterance only if **A** is acquainted with 'o' as an 'F'. Given this position, understanding can fail in at least two respects. First, **A** will fail to understand **S** if **A** is unacquainted with 'o'. Second, **A** can fail to understand **S** even if **A** is acquainted with 'o'. This can occur when **A**, though familiar with 'o', is unfamiliar with 'o' as uniquely satisfying 'F' in 'C'. Communication is successful, Christopher tells us, just in

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The special function of the {definite} article, as we have explained elsewhere, is anaphora (reference), that is, the presentation of a person [i.e. the referent of an **NP**] previously identified [i.e. known to speaker and hearer]. (1981: 33). (Material in '['] is the translator's; material in '{ }' is mine.)

See Lyons (1999) for a brief sketch of **FT** and its adherents. Despite its long history, **FT** has gone all but unnoticed within the philosophical community, even though some philosophers, such as Strawson (1950, 1952) and Chastain (1975) **have**, now and again, ahistorically proposed **FT** variants. Even Strawson and Chastain are unjustly ignorant of the past. Neither philosopher mentions W.E. Johnson (1921), the philosopher and logician, who held a variant of **FT** in 1921. Philosophers, however, are not alone in their ignorance. Christophersen makes just three passing references to Russell's The Analysis of Mind; Russell's theory of descriptions is not discussed at all. Gary Ostertag brought Johnson's paper to my attention.

<sup>12</sup> See Christophersen (1939: 73).

<sup>13</sup> According to Jespersen:

The definite article plus a substantive in the singular denotes one individual (supposed to be) more or less familiar to the speaker or writer. (1949: 479).

In this respect, Jespersen treatment of the definite article sharply diverges from Christophersen's. This divergence is rather intriguing; Jespersen's treatment, as he acknowledges, follows Christophersen's previous treatment. Jespersen, it seems, misinterprets Christophersen.

case **S** and **A**'s **basis of understanding** includes  $\lceil o \rceil$  as uniquely instantiating  $\lceil F \rceil$ . For Christophersen, a basis of understanding constitutes **S** and **A**'s shared knowledge.

According to Christophersen, linguistic and extra-linguistic features generate bases of understanding. To begin with the former, anaphoric chains can generate bases of understanding. **S** might begin a conversation with an indefinite description. **S**'s usage of the indefinite description, on Christophersen's account, can, in some cases, point to a certain individual that **S** and **A** mutually know to uniquely instantiate the property the nominal denotes.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the individual is part of the basis of understanding. **S**, then, can use an analogous definite description to refer to the individual.<sup>15</sup> Not only can the use of an indefinite description point to a particular individual,  $\lceil o \rceil$ ; it can also point to individuals that  $\lceil o \rceil$  is inferentially connected to.<sup>16</sup> These individuals also constitute aspects of the basis of understanding.<sup>17</sup> Consider (1):

1. A car stalled today.

An utterance of (1) can raise a particular car to salience. More interestingly, Christophersen claims that the utterance can also raise the car's carburetor, engine, steering wheel, and battery to salience. The carburetor, engine, steering wheel, and battery become a part of the basis of understanding. Consequently, **S** can felicitously continue an utterance of (1) with (2):

2. The battery died.

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<sup>14</sup> See Christophersen (1939: 29).

<sup>15</sup> In this respect, Christophersen provides an important historical antecedent to Kripke (1972), Donnellan (1978), and Lewis's (1979) position that **S**'s use of a general term can raise an individual to salience such that **S** and **A** can refer to that salient individual with a singular term.

<sup>16</sup> See Christophersen (1939: 29 – 30).

<sup>17</sup> Here, Christophersen stumbles upon Clark and Haviland's (1977) 'bridging inferences'.

Here, **S**'s utterance of 'the battery' refers to the salient car's battery, if it has one and only one such thing.

As mentioned, extra-linguistic features also generate bases of understanding. Shared perception is one such feature.<sup>18</sup> **S** and **A** mutually know those individuals that **S** and **A** mutually (and attentively) perceive. Naturally, then, **S** can use definite description-tokens to refer to these individuals. If Sally and Mary are in the kitchen and both are looking at the one coffee cup contained in it, Sally and Mary can use 'the coffee cup' to refer to that coffee cup. Shared memories also produce bases of understanding. Suppose that Sally and Mary went to the circus several years ago. The circus included an elephant. Sally and Mary vividly remember this elephant. Thus, the elephant belongs to their basis of understanding. Accordingly, Sally and Mary can, *ceteris paribus*, use 'the elephant' to refer to that elephant.

Christophersen's approach to the indefinite article is quite different. The indefinite article, as Christophersen explains, is 'neutral' with respect to familiarity.<sup>19</sup> Its neutrality is a product of its quantificational nature. Indefinite descriptions, we are told, are general terms. This stance is already implicit in his discussion of anaphoric chains. During that discussion, we noticed that Christophersen maintained that some uses of indefinite descriptions raise individuals to salience. They do not, however, refer to those individuals. Indefinite descriptions, we are told, denote quantities. The indefinite article, Christophersen explains, denotes 'unity'. For Christophersen, 'a' means 'one'.<sup>20</sup> Thus,

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<sup>18</sup> See Christophersen (1939: 30).

<sup>19</sup> See Christophersen (1939: 57, 74).

<sup>20</sup> See Christophersen (1939: 73, 98).

‘an F<sup>1</sup>’ and ‘one F<sup>1</sup>’, on Christophersen’s account, are synonymous expressions. Like Russell, Christophersen subjects indefinite descriptions to a quantificational treatment. The particular treatments, however, are distinct.<sup>21</sup>

Christophersen, it seems, accepts **F<sub>2</sub>** while rejecting **F<sub>1</sub>**. In this respect, Christophersen’s **FT** does not reach the level of homogeneity.<sup>22</sup> While Christophersen assimilates definite descriptions to singular terms, he assimilates indefinite descriptions to general terms. Christophersen’s **FT** is of the heterogeneous variety.

So, Christophersen’s heterogeneous **FT** proves insufficient to the demands of the ambiguity theorist. While Christophersen gestures towards a formulation of the character of ‘the<sub>R</sub>’, he fails to help provide any formulation of the character of ‘a<sub>R</sub>’.

Christophersen’s quantificational treatment of the indefinite article provides no more insight into the character of ‘a<sub>R</sub>’ than Russell’s does. What the ambiguity theorist needs is a homogeneous formulation of **FT**; the ambiguity theorist needs a formulation of **FT** that assimilates both definite and indefinite descriptions to singular terms. The ambiguity theorist finds it in Strawson.

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<sup>21</sup> Christophersen (1939: 33) does acknowledge that indefinite descriptions admit of referential uses; he calls such usage ‘introductory use’. Furthermore, Christophersen (1939: 98) maintains that the introductory use of indefinite descriptions was its initial, historical, usage. This usage, we are told, gave way to the quantificational use; what Christophersen tags the ‘classifying use’. Christophersen, in turn, denies ‘introductory’ usage any semantic import. To put it mildly, Christophersen’s discussion of the indefinite article is baffling.

<sup>22</sup> Thus, Heim is wrong to claim that Christophersen’s account of the indefinite/definite contrast is that: The essential function of definiteness is to signal that the intended referent of an NP is a referent with which the audience is already **familiar** at the current stage of the conversation. An indefinite NP, on the other hand, is used to signal that an as yet **unfamiliar**, i.e. **novel** referent is being introduced (1988: 298). (Her emphasis).

She is also mistaken in noting that:

Traditional grammarians, in particular Christophersen and Jespersen, worked on this question [the difference between the meaning of indefinite and definite descriptions] and came up with... (1) a definite is used to refer to something that is already **familiar** at the current stage of the conversation. An indefinite is used to introduce a **new** referent. (1983: 164). (Her emphasis).

#### 4.3.1.2 Strawson's Homogeneous FT

Unlike Christophersen's FT, Strawson's is homogeneous. Strawson accepts  $F_3$ . Loosely speaking, speakers conventionally use indefinite descriptions to refer to novel referents and definite descriptions to refer to familiar ones. Indefinite and definite descriptions are singular terms. As we shall see, Strawson explicates familiarity and novelty by appeal to **S**'s expectations of **A**'s epistemic access to individuals.

In his critiques of Russell's theory of descriptions, Strawson (1950, 1952) took aim at Russell's categorization of the indefinite/definite contrast.<sup>23</sup> For Strawson, Russell's suggestion that the articles differed solely in respect to uniqueness implications bordered on the 'wildly absurd', 'ludicrous', 'perverse' even.<sup>24</sup> Descriptions, we are told, are not in the business of quantification. Thus, the articles cannot differ on quantificational grounds. Rather, Strawson explains, descriptions are singular terms. Accordingly, the sole difference between the articles rests upon how they help secure reference. This difference, Strawson claims, centers upon familiarity:

The difference between the use of the definite and indefinite articles is, very roughly, as follows. We use 'the' either when a previous reference has been made, and when 'the' signalizes that the same reference is being made; or when, in the absence of a previous indefinite reference, the context (including the hearer's assumed knowledge) is expected to enable the hearer to tell **what** reference is being made. We use 'a' ... when these conditions are not fulfilled. (1950: 157). (His emphasis).<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Among his other criticisms, Strawson (1950) argued that: (a) uses of definite description-tokens presuppose, but do not assert, the existence of a satisfier of the nominal, and (b) utterances of sentence-tokens containing empty definite description-tokens fail to express propositions or, perhaps, express propositions that have truth-value gaps.

<sup>24</sup> See Strawson (1950: 157) and (1952: 186, 188).

<sup>25</sup> Also see Strawson (1952: 186 – 190).

Strawson holds that when **S** uses an indefinite description to refer to 「*o*」 in 「**C**」, the indefinite article indicates that **S** doesn't expect that **A** can, in some sense, immediately identify 「*o*」 in 「**C**」. **S** indicates that 「*o*」 is **novel** to **A** in 「**C**」. However, when **S** uses a definite description to refer to 「*o*」 in 「**C**」, the definite article indicates that **S** expects that **A** can, in some sense, immediately identify 「*o*」 in 「**C**」. In this case, **S** indicates that 「*o*」 is **familiar** to **A** in 「**C**」. The indefinite article indicates novelty; the definite article indicates familiarity. For Strawson, this difference in audience expectations provides, more or less, a complete characterization of the indefinite/definite contrast.

In contrast to Christophersen, Strawson does not hold that the referent of a definite description must uniquely satisfy the property the description's nominal denotes in 「**C**」.<sup>26</sup> The referent, says Strawson, need only satisfy the property in question; uniqueness is beside the point. Accordingly, Strawson can allow for referential uses of 'incomplete' definite descriptions. Christophersen, it seems, cannot. In 3.3.6.2, we saw that speakers often use 'incomplete' definite descriptions referentially. Christophersen must deny this claim. In order to do so, he must adopt either the explicit or implicit approach. But, as we have seen, both approaches falter when ignorant speakers confront them. This,

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<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, Christophersen discussion of uniqueness focuses upon tables:

In a room with only one table, provided no other table has just been mentioned, the phrase 'the table' will call up the idea of that particular piece of furniture contained in the room in question. ...The essential thing is that he [the hearer] knows that there is one (and only one) table in the room, and that it is this table that is meant. If there are several tables and only one is to be the center of attention, a demonstrative must be used: 'this table', 'that table'. A demonstrative does not demand so narrow a field of attention as the article; it is used to pick out one individual from among several possibilities, while the article cannot be used if there is more than one possible interpretation. (1939: 28)

Compare this with Strawson's discussion:

Now it is obviously quite false that the phrase 'the table' in the sentence 'the table is covered with books', used normally, will 'only have an application in the event of there being one table and no more'. It is indeed tautologically true that, in such a use, the phrase will have an application only in the event of there being one table and no more **which is being referred to**, and that it will be understood to have an application only in the event of there being one table and no more which it is understood as being used to refer to. (1950: 147 – 148). (His emphasis).

remember, is the argument from ignorance. Christophersen, like Russell, falls prey to this argument. So, Strawson, it seems, provides an empirically superior suggestion. As such, we reject Christophersen's uniqueness condition on the definite article. This rejection places referential definite and indefinite descriptions on the same level. The referential articles, we shall maintain, do not entail uniqueness.

The ambiguity theorist ought to find Strawson's presentation much more congenial than Christophersen's. Strawson treats descriptions in a uniform manner; he treats them as singular terms. Accordingly, Strawson, unlike Christophersen, produces formulations of the meanings of the articles in purely referential terms. Strawson provides the ambiguity theorist with the groundwork for the semantics of both referential articles. The character of 'a<sub>R</sub>' relies upon S's expectation that A cannot immediately identify S's referent. In contrast, the character of 'the<sub>R</sub>' relies upon S's expectation that A can immediately identify S's referent. This is quite promising.

Still, Strawson's formulations are very rough. They depend upon a seemingly vague notion: 'identification'. In order to complete his final task, then, the ambiguity theorist must provide a plausible explication of the notion of 'identification'. In particular, the ambiguity theorist must explain the conditions under which a person can properly be said to identify the referent of a singular term as the referent of that term. Only after sharpening the notion of 'identification' will the ambiguity theorist find himself in a position to provide a proper semantics for the referential articles. The causal theory of reference (CT, hereafter), we maintain, allows for such a sharpening.

### 4.3.2 Prompting, Reference Borrowing, and Identification

**CT** holds that **S**'s use of a singular term,  $\langle e \rangle$ , refers to  $\langle o \rangle$  just in case **S**'s usage of  $\langle e \rangle$  is causally grounded in  $\langle o \rangle$ .<sup>27</sup> Causal groundings serve both as a necessary and sufficient condition for reference. Ultimately, **S**'s use of  $\langle e \rangle$  is causally grounded in  $\langle o \rangle$  just in case the prompting condition is satisfied:

**Prompting Condition:**  $\langle o \rangle$  prompts **S** to use  $\langle e \rangle$ .

Referents prompt producers directly and indirectly. Whenever direct causal contact with  $\langle o \rangle$  prompts **S** to use  $\langle e \rangle$  to refer to  $\langle o \rangle$ , we have direct prompting. Perception serves as a paradigm case. Whenever  $\langle o \rangle$  prompts **S** to use  $\langle e \rangle$  through indirect causal contact, we have indirect prompting. 'Reference borrowing' constitutes a special case of indirect prompting. Suppose that **S**'s usage of  $\langle e \rangle$  is causally linked to **T**'s usage. Specifically, **S** intends to use  $\langle e \rangle$  to refer to whomever **T** did.<sup>28</sup> Here, **S**, as it were, **borrow**s the reference of  $\langle e \rangle$  from **T**. Now, suppose that  $\langle o \rangle$  directly prompts **T**. In this case,  $\langle o \rangle$  indirectly prompts **S** to use  $\langle e \rangle$ . Here, we have a causal chain stretching back from **S** to

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<sup>27</sup> This, of course, isn't completely accurate. **CT** makes room for reference fixing via quantificational definite descriptions. For instances, **CT** holds that Sally can fix the reference of the 'descriptive' name 'Mimeo' by specifying that the name refers to whoever is the tallest New Yorker in 2007. Suppose John uniquely satisfies the description. In that case, Sally's use of 'Mimeo' refers to John, even though Sally lacks any causal contact with John. Such cases, however, are irrelevant to our immediate purposes. As such, we shall ignore this complication. See 2.1.1, fn. 7 for further details.

<sup>28</sup> This, of course, doesn't imply that **S**'s intention must involve **T** as a constituent. As Devitt explains: If  $x$  borrows the reference of a term from  $y$  then that is an intentional act at the time of receiving  $y$ 's communication. In contrast, if  $x$  defers to  $y$ 's use of a term then that is likely to be an intentional act at the time of  $x$ 's using the term herself to communicate. In my view,  $x$ 's dependence on  $y$  **must** involve an act of the former sort but **need not** involve one of the latter sort. A communication involving a borrowed term need not involve any intention that looks back to the occasion of borrowing. (2006c: 99). (His emphasis).

「*o*」 via **T**. **S**'s usage of 「*e*」 is causally grounded in **T**'s usage, which is causally grounded in 「*o*」.<sup>29</sup>

Good illustrations always help. Consider simple demonstratives. Sally **hears** a loud noise. Responding to this perception, Sally says ‘that came from the living room’. As such, the loud noise directly prompts Sally’s use of ‘that’. Sally’s usage of ‘that’ is causally grounded in the loud noise. Within **CT**, then, Sally uses a ‘that’-token to refer to the loud noise. This seems intuitive enough.

Indirect prompting and ‘reference borrowing’ are best illustrated by the use of proper names. Adopting Devitt’s (1974, 1981a) secular vocabulary, let’s maintain that language-users confer names upon individuals at ‘naming ceremonies’. At the typical naming ceremony, the namer is in direct causal contact with the namee: the namer perceives the namee.<sup>30</sup> During this perception, the namer bestows a name upon the namee. For instance, Sally gives birth to a boy. She **looks** at the child. She says ‘we shall call him ‘Tom’’.<sup>31</sup> After this ceremony, Tom acquires a name, namely ‘Tom’. Sally, on the other hand, acquires a new ability; she acquires the ability to refer to Tom by ‘Tom’. She acquires this ability in virtue of her causal connection to Tom via the

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<sup>29</sup> **CT** originates with Donnellan (1972, 1974), Kripke (1972), and Putnam’s (1975) groundbreaking works. Taking the rough outline the latter two theorists provide, Devitt (1974, 1981a) presents a fully developed version of **CT**, which withstands Evans’s (1973) brilliant critique. Devitt (2001) provides more recent developments and consequences **CT** has on semantic theory in general. For a summation of **CT**’s brief history, see Reimer (2003).

<sup>30</sup> Donnellan presents an atypical case, himself:

The first use of a name to refer to some particular individual might be in an assertion about him, rather than any ceremony of **giving** the individual that name. (In fact, my own name is an example: I discovered that colleagues were pronouncing my last name differently than my parents do – so orally, they referred to me by a different name – and I let it stand. But I was never dubbed by that new name. I am sure that the first use of it was either an assertion, question or whatever about me and not a kind of baptism. And I think it is probable that whatever audience there was knew to whom the speaker referred.). (1974: 19, fn. 13). (His emphasis).

<sup>31</sup> Tom directly prompts Sally’s use of the ‘him’-token.

name ‘Tom’. Through her perception of him, Sally’s ability is causally grounded in Tom.<sup>32</sup>

After the naming ceremony, Sally puts her newly acquired ability to use. In Tom’s absence, Sally says ‘I should feed Tom now’. Here, Tom does not directly prompt Sally to use ‘Tom’. Nonetheless, her usage of the ‘Tom’-token refers to Tom. Why? Sally’s usage is the product of an ability causally grounded in Tom; it is the product of an ability acquired through direct perception of Tom. Here, Tom indirectly prompts Sally.

Afterwards, Sally calls her parents to tell them the good news. Straight away, Sally exclaims ‘I had a son. His name is ‘Tom’’. Through her utterance, so the causal theorist tells us, Sally imparts to her parents the ability to refer to Tom by ‘Tom’. In turn, Sally’s parents borrow the reference of ‘Tom’ from Sally. As such, Sally passes onto her parents the ability to express and understand a host of propositions expressed by utterances containing ‘Tom’-tokens. For instance, Sally’s parents can, through the usage of ‘Tom’, express or understand that Tom is healthy, happy, hungry, or sleepy. Furthermore, Sally’s parents can pass on their newly acquired ability to others just as Sally passed it on to them.

When they received their ability, Sally’s parents did not have any direct perception of ‘Tom’. So, Tom did not play a direct role in their acquisition. He did, however, play an indirect role. By directly perceiving the products of Sally’s referential ability, Sally’s parents acquire their referential ability. Sally’s referential ability, remember, is causally

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<sup>32</sup> Still, matters are somewhat more complicated. Here, Sally’s particular abilities to name Tom ‘Tom’ in a naming ceremony and to refer to Tom by using ‘Tom’-tokens is anchored in her general abilities to name individuals and to use names. What, exactly, anchors these general abilities? I shall not hazard a guess. See Devitt (1974, 1981a) for further discussion.

grounded in Tom. So, Sally's parents' ability to successfully refer to Tom by 'Tom' is indirectly linked to Tom through Sally.<sup>33</sup>

For the causal theorist, 'identification' receives the following treatment: a person identifies the referent of a singular term as the referent of that term *iff* the person's use of the singular term is causally grounded in the referent. In short, identification is successful reference!<sup>34</sup> Successful reference, as we saw, can result from direct prompting, indirect prompting, or reference borrowing.

As a consequence, **CT** makes some extraordinary predictions. Besides forecasting that a person can identify the referent of a singular term the person hasn't come into direct causal contact with, **CT** predicts that a person can identify a referent that he has had only the faintest of indirect causal contact with. For example, **CT** predicts that I can identify Hume as the referent of 'Hume'. Let's call this the 'faint prediction'. **CT** makes a second forecast. A speaker, we are told, can be completely ignorant of any property the referent uniquely instantiates and still be able to correctly identify the referent. Here, we stumble upon the 'ignorance prediction'. Finally, **CT** predicts that a person can identify the referent of a singular term in those cases where the person is in total error about the properties that the referent uniquely instantiates. Were all my current beliefs about Hume

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<sup>33</sup> Does this entail that when a parrot repeats Sally's use of 'Tom', the parrot has referred to Tom as well? Surely not! The parrot, unlike Sally's parents, lacks the general ability to use names, to refer, and thus to borrow references. As such, the parrot merely parrots Sally's usage.

<sup>34</sup> Usually, 'identification' suggests the ability to 'pick out' an object through the employment of one's sensory apparatus. So, for example, if Sally cannot pick Mary out of a police lineup, one might maintain that Sally cannot identify Mary. We, of course, are not using 'identification' in this narrow sense. At the considerable risk of generating confusion, we shall stick to the term in order to preserve continuity with the literature.

absolutely false, the causal theorist claims that I could still possibly identify Hume as the referent of 'Hume'.<sup>35</sup> Let's christen this final prediction the 'error prediction'.

These predictions, extraordinary as they are, receive quick confirmation. Consider the faint prediction. It is undeniable that we do express and understand propositions containing individuals we lack direct causal contact with. After all, we can express and understand (4) via an utterance of (3):

3. Hume was not skinny.
4. <<Hume, Skinny> NEG>.

We could not have these abilities unless we were, in Russell's terminology, acquainted with Hume as the referent of 'Hume'. In our parlance, these abilities presuppose that we can identify Hume as the referent of 'Hume'. Accordingly, we confirm the faint prediction.

The philosophically young help us confirm the ignorance prediction. John has just begun his philosophical training. On his first day, he learns about empiricism. His professor tells him that two philosophers, Locke and Hume, were empiricists. John learns nothing else that day. (His teacher is taking it very slow.) Here, John does not know the properties Hume uniquely instantiates. John forgets, for instance, that his teacher mentioned Hume second. John, however, can express and understand (4) via (3). Accordingly, John's ignorance confirms CT's ignorance prediction. As John demonstrates, a person can express and understand a proposition containing an individual even when the person cannot identify the properties the individual uniquely instantiates.

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<sup>35</sup> Kripke (1972), remember, uses these types of arguments to defeat the description theory of ordinary proper names.

We can also verify the error prediction. Suppose tomorrow we discover that all our uniquely identifying information regarding Hume is false. Historians tell us that our beloved Hume was actually a skinny Irish woman who never pondered the depths of human nature, natural religion, or English history. Surely this state of affairs would not diminish our ability to express or understand (4) via (3). After all, it is Hume that we have learned something new about. Even here, then, we are still acquainted with Hume; we are still able to identify Hume as the referent of ‘Hume’. Accordingly, we can identify Hume despite our total error about the properties he uniquely instantiates. This, of course, confirms the error prediction.

So, **CT** provides us with an explication of ‘identification’. Although this explication might seem too liberal, it is, as we have seen, well confirmed. It predicts and, thereby, explains certain fascinating facts about our abilities to express and understand propositions containing constituents that we have only faint and indirect causal contact with, that we are ignorant about, or that we have false information about. With this notion of ‘identification’ in place, we move to present a proper formulation of the referential articles’ characters.

#### *4.3.3 The Referential Articles and Their Characters*

As we saw, the quantificational articles themselves contribute to what is expressed. They provide functions. The referential articles, however, do not behave this way. The referential articles can only make a semantic contribution in conjunction with nominals. Simply put, referential descriptions, as a syntactic unit, contribute to what is expressed. Alone, the referential articles are propositionally inert. Their inertness forces us to provide the referential articles’ characters with reference to referential descriptions.

Accordingly, we propose the following Strawsonian characters:

**(R<sub>ID</sub>) The Character of ‘a<sub>R</sub>’.** Utter a token exemplifying ‘an<sub>R</sub> F’ to refer to ‘o’ in ‘C’ only if you expect that **A** cannot immediately identify ‘o’ as your referent under the supposition that ‘o’ is an ‘F’ in ‘C’.

**(R<sub>D</sub>) The Character of ‘the<sub>R</sub>’.** Utter a token exemplifying ‘the<sub>R</sub> F’ to refer to ‘o’ in ‘C’ only if you expect that **A** can immediately identify ‘o’ as your referent under the supposition that ‘o’ is an ‘F’ in ‘C’.

Essentially, ‘an<sub>R</sub>’ indicates that **A** is not acquainted with **S**’s referent under the assumption that the referent fits the nominal; ‘the<sub>R</sub>’ indicates that **A** is acquainted with **S**’s referent in just this manner. In English, this is the articles’ conventional use.

Accordingly, **S** competently uses referential indefinite descriptions to refer to ‘novel’ referents, while **S** competently uses referential definite descriptions to refer to ‘familiar’ ones. We have a homogeneous **FT**.<sup>36</sup>

As we can see, these characters rest on three crucial features: reference, immediate identification, and supposition. Each feature deserves some comment. We begin with reference.

#### 4.3.3.1 Character and Reference

Both **R<sub>ID</sub>** and **R<sub>D</sub>** hold that **S** uses referential descriptions to refer to particular individuals. How is this possible? And, furthermore, which particular individual does **S** refer to? Here, **CT** provides clarity. It is possible for **S** to use a referential description to refer to a particular individual because it is possible for a particular individual to prompt **S** to use a referential description. It is possible that **S**’s usage is causally grounded in a

<sup>36</sup> Devitt proposes similar characters:

In a deictic use of ‘that F’, as indeed of ‘that’, the speaker **S** wishes to convey **S**’s intention that the audience **A** should identify the object **S** has in mind with an object that **A** has in mind independently of **S**. ...The conventions for a referential definite are very similar to those for the demonstrative but those for an indefinite differ interestingly. In using ‘an F’ referentially, **S** (usually) does not convey any intention that **A** should identify the object **S** has in mind with an object that **A** can identify independently. (2004: 293).

particular individual. In this sense, **S** can identify the referents of the referential descriptions he employs. **S**, then, refers to whatever individual prompts him to use the referential description in question. So, for instance, when Jones's erratic behavior prompts Sally to use 'the<sub>R</sub> murderer', Sally refers to Jones.

#### 4.3.3.1.1 *A Brief Interlude: Reference and Discourse Reference*

As is plain, on our account, referential descriptions have individuals as referents. In this respect, our traditional **FT** makes a radical break with the unitary **FT**s currently in fashion. In particular, we part company with Karttunen (1976), Kamp (1981), and Heim (1983, 1988). These theorists hold that descriptions 'refer', not to individuals, but to abstractions, namely discourse referents. Discourse referents, we are told, are representations that contain information. As Karttunen and Heim suggest, discourse referents are akin to file cards that have been scribbled on. Indefinite descriptions introduce novel discourse referents; definite descriptions refer to familiar discourse referents.

Let's illustrate. Sally says (5):

5. (a) A horse<sup>1</sup> ate an apple<sup>2</sup>. (b) The horse<sub>1</sub> was hungry.

Here, the indefinite descriptions, 'a horse' and 'an apple', introduce 'file card<sub>1</sub>' and 'file card<sub>2</sub>', respectively. These are their discourse referents. On file card<sub>1</sub>, we write 'is a horse' and 'ate 2'; we inscribe 'is an apple' and 'ate by 1' on file card<sub>2</sub>. The anaphoric definite description, 'the horse', also has file card<sub>1</sub> as its discourse referent; in this sense, the discourse referent is familiar. Sally's utterance of (5b) forces an updating of file card<sub>1</sub>. After the utterance, we write 'was hungry' on it. On our account, however, the indefinite descriptions, **if referential**, refer to particular individuals. In the case at hand,

‘a horse’ (presumably) refers to some particular horse, while ‘an apple’ (presumably) refers to some particular apple.

The motivation for introducing ‘discourse referents’ is a familiar one: uniformity. As always, there is a desire to avoid ambiguity. As a univocal account centered upon reference to individuals, **FT** fails; it cannot account for the conventional nature of attributive uses of descriptions. Discourse referents, it is claimed, provide an escape hatch. Heim explains:

In order to avoid untenable claims about reference, Karttunen reformulates the familiarity theory by using a new notion, that of ‘discourse reference’, in place of ‘reference’. So instead of [**F**<sub>3</sub>], he has a requirement that a definite **NP** has to pick out an already familiar **discourse** referent, whereas an indefinite **NP** always introduces a new **discourse** referent. Since discourse reference is distinct from reference, and since, in particular, an **NP** may have a discourse referent even when it has no referent, this reformulation makes the familiarity theory immune to the objections encountered by its traditional version [**F**<sub>3</sub>]. (1983: 165). (Her emphasis).

This position, however, faces three problems. First, while uniformity might, in general, be a noble pursuit, descriptions are simply not amenable to uniform treatment; ambiguity plagues the articles. With the hope for a uniform treatment dashed, ‘discourse referents’ become an unnecessary complication in one’s semantic theory. Ontological simplicity rules against their incorporation.<sup>37</sup> Second, this position severs the word-world relationship. Instead of singular terms referring directly to concrete individuals, Karttunen, Kamp, and Heim must hold that singular terms sometimes ‘refer’ to individuals but only indirectly through a second set of linguistic representations. Finally,

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<sup>37</sup> Szabó (2000) holds that while discourse referents lack a semantic role, they, nonetheless, might play a pivotal role as mental representations in discourse comprehension. As Szabó admits, this is simply wild speculation.

as Karttunen (1976) and Heim (1983) concede, discourse reference simply isn't real reference. Bach expands:

Discourse reference is no more reference than our relation to our perceptual experiences (as opposed to objects perceived) is perception. The basic problem is simply this: a chain of 'reference' is not a chain of **reference** unless it is anchored in an actual ('extra-linguistic') referent. (2004: 214). (His emphasis).

Individuals, not 'linguistic' discourse referents, are capable of promptings. As such, we refer to individuals, not to discourse referents.

Heim's general semantic analysis of descriptions further illuminates the divergence between discourse reference and reference. According to Heim, an utterance of (5a) ('A horse ate an apple.') expresses:

6. [Some  $x, y$ ] ((horse  $x$  & apple  $y$ ) & ate ( $x, y$ )).<sup>38</sup>

The indefinite description 'a horse' contributes 'horse  $x$ '; 'an apple' contributes 'apple  $y$ '. The unselective quantifier, [Some  $x, y$ ], we are told, appears covertly in (5a).<sup>39</sup> Now, (6) is a general proposition; it does not contain any individuals. In what sense, then, do the indefinite descriptions refer? None, it appears. Discourse reference is reference only in name. Ironically, then, Karttunen, Kamp, and Heim accommodate attributive usage at the expense of referential usage! These theorists, thereby, share the same fate as the dedicated Russellian.

Since our version of **FT** is embedded within **AT**, we do not need to introduce discourse referents. We are not seeking a univocal account. As such, our ontology

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<sup>38</sup> See Heim (1983). As Diesing (1991) demonstrates, Heim and Kamp's semantic analyses of the proposition expressed are more or less identical. Thus, whatever holds for Heim holds, more or less, for Kamp.

<sup>39</sup> Unselective quantifiers are those quantifiers that bind all free variables in their scope. See Lewis (1975) and Heim (1983) for details.

remains simpler; we don't introduce a second ontological category, namely 'discourse referents'. Furthermore, we, unlike, Karttunen, Kamp, and Heim, can adequately account for attributive, as well as, referential usage. Our traditional **FT**, then, trumps their revisionist versions.

#### 4.3.3.2 *Character and Supposition*

We now turn to 'supposition'. For us, 'supposition' is no term of art; it retains its ordinary sense. A person supposes that  $\ulcorner o \urcorner$  is  $\ulcorner F \urcorner$  whenever the person entertains a situation that predicates  $\ulcorner F \urcorner$  of  $\ulcorner o \urcorner$ . Nothing more is required.

Now, on our account, the nominal provides the supposition in question. This contribution, we maintain, constitutes the nominal's sole semantic contribution within referential contexts; whenever a referential article has immediate scope over a nominal, the nominal contributes a supposition that the referent instantiates the property the nominal denotes outside the immediate scope of the referential article. This constitutes the nominal's conventional use in referential contexts. Later, in 4.4, we defend this controversial position. For now, we just want to draw out some features our position entails.

First, our view does not preserve semantic innocence. For us, nominals make different semantic contributions in different syntactic environments.<sup>40</sup> Inside referential contexts, they contribute suppositions; outside referential contexts, they provide properties. Second, on our account, misdescription cases have semantical import. Since prompting solely determines reference, **S** can use 'the<sub>R</sub> murderer' to refer to a non-

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<sup>40</sup> This does not, on our account, make all nominals context-sensitive. Nominals still make the same semantic contribution in different contexts; the contributions are just relativized to distinct syntactic environments.

murderer just in case a non-murderer prompts **S**'s usage. Since the nominal does not contribute a property to the proposition expressed, **S**'s utterance of 'the<sub>R</sub> murderer is insane' might express a true proposition even though the referent of 'the<sub>R</sub> murderer' is not a murderer. With referential descriptions, semantic reference and speaker reference, we maintain, collide. Nonetheless, in referential contexts, the nominal performs an important pragmatic function. Following Larson and Segal, we hold that the nominal, in referential contexts, acts as an information pointer; it typically helps **A** perceptually locate **S**'s referent.<sup>41</sup> So, for example, the nominal 'murderer' can, in numerous cases, enable **A** to perceptually locate the individual **S** refers to by his use of 'the<sub>R</sub> murderer'. This function, in turn, aids effective communication.

#### 4.3.3.3 *Character and Immediate Identification*

Now, what about immediate identification? Identification, according to **CT**, is successful reference. Within **CT**, immediate identification receives a modal treatment. **A** can immediately identify **S**'s referent,  $\lceil o \rceil$ , as **S**'s referent just in case **A could have**, prior to **S**'s utterance, successfully referred to  $\lceil o \rceil$  by the singular term **S** employed.

Take referential definite descriptions. Sally and Mary are at Jones's trial. Sally and Mary are attentively eyeing Jones's psychotic activities. Each spectator mutually supposes that Jones is guilty. As such, Mary can use 'the<sub>R</sub> murderer' to refer to Jones; Mary can identify Jones as the referent of Sally's usage of 'the<sub>R</sub> murderer'. Sally, for her

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<sup>41</sup> Here's Larson and Segal,

[The nominal] functions as an often helpful 'information pointer' to the object that the utterer is getting at. But this role is completely nonsemantic, and when the information is incorrect, it can be ignored. (1995: 213).

Although this particular quote comes from a discussion on complex demonstratives, Larson and Segal extend this position to referential descriptions. For instance, see (1995: 341 – 342). I should mention that I'm not in full agreement with Larson and Segal. Sometimes 'incorrect' nominals can be just as helpful, or even more helpful, than 'correct' nominals. This, at least, seems to be the case with Donnellan's (1966) king/usurper example.

part, expects this much. So, Sally uses the referential description to refer to Jones. Since Mary could identify Jones under the supposition that he was a murderer prior to Sally's utterance, Mary could immediately identify Jones under the supposition that he is a murderer.  $\mathbf{R}_D$  accounts for Sally's linguistic activity. Now take indefinite referential descriptions. Sally attends Jones's murder trial alone. After Jones's trial concludes, Sally meets Mary. Sally wishes to begin a conversation about Jones. She has, however, forgotten his name. Furthermore, Sally rightly expects that Mary and Jones are causally isolated. Sally expects that Mary cannot identify Jones at all, let alone as a supposed murderer. Sally, then, uses 'a<sub>R</sub> murderer' to refer to Jones.  $\mathbf{R}_{ID}$  captures this linguistic activity as well.<sup>42</sup>

On our gloss, those singular terms that require **A** to immediately identify **S**'s referent **block** reference borrowing. Here, **A** must already be able to identify the referent of the singular term in question as the referent of that singular term. Accordingly, referential definite descriptions are not devices that can initiate reference borrowing. On the other hand, those singular terms that indicate that **A** cannot immediately identify **S**'s referent **invite** reference borrowing. So, in essence, referential indefinite descriptions are reference borrowing devices.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>  $\mathbf{R}_{ID}$  and  $\mathbf{R}_D$  allow for two interesting exploitations. In some cases, **S** might want to talk about someone that **A** can immediately identify without indicating **A** is in fact familiar with the individual **S** has in mind. Here, **S** can exploit  $\mathbf{R}_{ID}$ . By using an indefinite description, **S** indicates that **A** is unfamiliar with the individual that **S** wishes to discuss. As a result, **S** can keep the 'identity' of the individual he has in mind secret. Strawson (1950) labeled these exploitations 'arch uses'. In other cases, as Christophersen (1939) notes, **S** might want to convey that **A** ought to be or ought **to get** familiar with the individual **S** wishes to discuss. This exploitation is standard in literary contexts. Here, **S** can exploit  $\mathbf{R}_D$ . By using a definite description, **S** indicates that **A** is familiar with the individual **S** wishes to discuss. We shall label such exploitations 'catch-up uses'.

<sup>43</sup> Employing different terminology, Devitt (2004: 293) reaches similar conclusions.

With the characters of the referential articles firmly in place, we move to consider the referential articles' status as a semantic contrast set.

#### 4.3.4 *The Referential Articles as a Semantic Contrast Set*

Obviously, the referential articles belong to the same semantic category; they are referential determiners. Furthermore, the referential articles have non-synonymous meanings;  $\mathbf{R}_{ID}$  and  $\mathbf{R}_D$  are distinct characters. The referential articles, then, compose a semantic contrast set, namely  $\{ 'a_R', 'the_R' \}$ . Let's refer to this set as ' $\mathbf{B}$ '.<sup>44</sup>

$\mathbf{B}$ , it appears, is subsumed under a larger semantic contrast set. 'This' and 'that', let's recall, are also referential determiners. Since, 'this' and 'that' are not synonymous with the referential articles or with each other, the simple demonstratives join the referential articles to compose a larger semantic contrast set:  $\{ 'this', 'a_R', 'that', 'the_R' \}$  ( $\mathbf{B}'$ , hereafter). This seems quite natural. Often times, the complex demonstrative  $\lceil \text{this } F \rceil$  will compete with the referential indefinite description  $\lceil \text{an}_R F \rceil$ .<sup>45</sup> For example,  $\mathbf{S}$  might begin an anaphoric chain with an utterance of (7):

7. This man fell down today.<sup>46</sup>

Here,  $\mathbf{S}$  could have just as well initiated the chain with (8):

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<sup>44</sup> Here, a distinct explanation of the contrastive feel of focused descriptions surfaces. Following Ludlow and Segal (**L&S**, hereafter) (2004), consider (i):

(i). That wasn't a reason John left Pittsburg, it was the reason.

In this example, we might say that the contrastive feel is generated by the fact that the denial of the indefinite description and the assertion of the definite description indicates that 'the reason' John left is not just some novel, previously unmentioned reason, but a familiar, well-known, reason. For further discussion regarding focused descriptions and the novel/familiarity distinction see **L&S** (2004: 434 – 435). For a previous Russellian assessment, see 2.2.1 fn. 24.

<sup>45</sup> See Devitt (2004), Ludlow and Neale (1991), Larson and Segal (1995), and Neale (2004). The latter three theorists take this as evidence that 'this' is a quantifier determiner. Devitt, of course, takes the opposing view.

<sup>46</sup> On several occasions, I've been told that this is a colloquial use of  $\lceil \text{this } F \rceil$ . I'm rather skeptical of this claim; such usage is so rampant that it strikes me as an obvious convention.

8.  $A_R$  man fell down today.

Other times, a referential definite description will compete with 'this F' and 'that F'.

Take the following scenario. Sally is on her computer. The computer freezes. Shortly after, the computer screen goes black. Frustrated, Sally says 'this computer is broken'.

Here, 'the<sub>R</sub> computer is broken' would do just as well. Suppose, further, that Sally suspects that a particular student in the philosophy department lounge can fix her computer. Staring at the student, Sally tells Mary 'the<sub>R</sub> student can fix it'. Nothing, I imagine, would be lost or gained had Sally said 'that student can fix it' instead. If **B'** is a semantic contrast set, we can readily explain such competitions. They are the result of the contrastive nature of the members of **B'**. If, on the other hand, **B'** is not a semantic contrast set, we seem to be left without any serious explanation of these competitions.

Although the referential articles constitute a semantic contrast set, they fail to compose a Horn scale. The referential articles do not meet the entailment restriction.<sup>47</sup>

Take (9) and (10):

9. 'An<sub>R</sub> F is G'.

10. 'The<sub>R</sub> F is G'.

Now, assertive utterances of sentence-tokens exemplifying (9) and (10) will either have equivalent content or they will have non-equivalent content. In the former case, the utterances will entail each other. This, however, violates the entailment restriction. In the latter case, no entailment relation will hold among the content of the utterances. Once again, this violates the entailment restriction. In either case, then, the referential articles

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<sup>47</sup> See 1.2.1 for further details.

fail to meet the entailment restriction. Accordingly,  $\langle 'a_R', 'the_R' \rangle$  and  $\langle 'the_R', 'a_R' \rangle$  are not Horn scales.

So, unlike their quantificational brethren, the referential articles do not compose Horn scales. This outcome should not be surprising. Since singular terms only contribute individuals, we'd hardly expect that we should discover the appropriate entailment relations holding among their tokens. The same, however, cannot be said of general terms. The quantificational and referential articles do, however, share an important similarity: they compose semantic contrast sets. So, Russell's account of the indefinite/definite contrast is **incomplete**; Russell fails to account for the semantic contrast sets that the referential articles participate in.

#### 4.4 Nominals and Their Contributions

While discussing  $\mathbf{R}_{ID}$  and  $\mathbf{R}_D$ , we assigned the nominal a minimal role. The nominal, we suggested, simply provides a supposition that the referent instantiates the property the nominal denotes outside referential contexts. Here, we defend this minimal position. We will, with caution, insist that the nominal does not play a more maximal semantic role.

A referential description's nominal might make at least two non-minimal contributions to what is expressed. First, the nominal might contribute a property to what is expressed. In this case, the referential description's nominal and the quantificational description's nominal make the same semantic contribution. This approach preserves semantic innocence; in every syntactic environment, the nominal's semantic contribution remains stable. Let's label this approach, the 'semantic innocence approach'; its proponents we shall call 'innocent theorists'.<sup>48</sup> Second, the nominal might help to

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<sup>48</sup> Insofar as Lepore and Ludwig (2000), and Neale (2004, 2005b) postulate a semantically significant referential reading, each theorist adopts the semantic innocence approach.

determine reference. On this approach, **S** successfully refers to  $\ulcorner o \urcorner$  by using  $\ulcorner \text{an}_R F \urcorner$  or  $\ulcorner \text{the}_R F \urcorner$  *iff* the prompting and instantiation conditions are met.

**Prompting Condition:**  $\ulcorner o \urcorner$  prompts **S** to use  $\ulcorner \text{an}_R F \urcorner$  or  $\ulcorner \text{the}_R F \urcorner$ .

**Instantiation Condition:**  $\ulcorner o \urcorner$  instantiates the property  $\ulcorner F \urcorner$  denotes.

Here, the nominal acts as a filter. Metaphorically speaking, the nominal filters out all those objects that do not satisfy the nominal from the set of possible referents. This filtering process guarantees that successful reference will be to an individual that instantiates the property the nominal denotes. This approach we dub the ‘filter approach’; its proponents are ‘filter theorists’.<sup>49, 50</sup> On the filter approach, **S**’s referential intention will be thwarted whenever  $\ulcorner o \urcorner$  fails to instantiate the property the nominal denotes. In such cases, reference failure results. For instance, the filter theorist must maintain that, in misdescription cases, **S** fails to refer to  $\ulcorner o \urcorner$ . In misdescription cases, then, **S**’s utterance of a sentence-token exemplifying  $\ulcorner \text{An}_R F \text{ is } G \urcorner$  or  $\ulcorner \text{The}_R F \text{ is } G \urcorner$  fails to express a proposition.

We, however, have opted for a third approach: minimalism; we are ‘minimalist theorists’.<sup>51</sup> For us, the nominal neither contributes a property nor partially determines

<sup>49</sup> This, it seems, is the consensus position. Hornsby (1977), Kaplan (1978a), Devitt (1981a, 1981b), Fodor and Sag (1982), Barwise and Perry (1983), Wilson (1984), Partee (1986), Recanati (1989b, 1993), Bezuidenhout (1997), and Reimer (1998a) hold this view. Peacocke (1975: 213 – 216) seems to endorse the filter approach while acknowledging that it has some problems. Schiffer (2005: 1160) also seems to tentatively endorse the filter approach. While Devitt (1974, 2004) rejects that a referential description’s nominal only provides a supposition, he remains neutral with respect to the filter approach and the semantic innocence approach.

<sup>50</sup> Obviously, the semantic innocence approach and the filter approach are not mutually exclusive; one can consistently maintain that the nominal contributes a property and, at the same time, partially determines reference. Thus, another approach emerges: inclusionism.

<sup>51</sup> Although minimalism is consistent with the view Donnellan (1966, 1968, 1978) would favor if he unambiguously held **AT**, it is very much a minority position. Beside myself, I know of only three theorists that hold it: Stalnaker (1972), Chastain (1975), and Larson and Segal (1995). See Heim (1991) for a formalization of Stalnaker’s position.

reference. Within referential contexts, the nominal, we argue, is referentially and propositionally inert.

Our argument for minimalism begins on theoretical grounds. First, we argue that, *ceteris paribus*, some important theory-internal considerations seem to demand minimalism. Next, we demonstrate that the most popular argument for adopting a non-minimalist position, the argument from entailment, is inconclusive. In light of this demonstration, minimalism retains its default position given our theoretical commitments.

Our adherence to **CT** restricts our adoption of the filter approach. **CT**, remember, holds that prompting constitutes both a necessary and sufficient condition for the determination of reference. For the filter theorist, prompting constitutes nothing more than a necessary condition. The filter approach, then, requires substantial revisions to **CT**. Since **CT** is well confirmed, conservation requires that, *ceteris paribus*, we reject the filter approach.

Our adherence to direct reference theory (**DR**, hereafter) precludes our support for the innocent theorist. According to **DR**, singular terms only contribute individuals to what is expressed.<sup>52</sup> Referential descriptions, as a syntactic unit, contribute to what is expressed. If nominals contribute properties, then referential descriptions, as a syntactic unit, do not

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<sup>52</sup> See Kaplan (1989a, 1989b) for a traditional explication and defense of **DR**. Some alleged obstacles **DR** faces include: (a) providing a sensible account of the cognitive difference between identity statements such as 'Clark Kent is Clark Kent' and 'Clark Kent is Superman', and (b) explaining the apparent inability to properly substitute co-referential singular terms into certain attitude contexts, like belief contexts. Focusing upon these obstacles as well as some methodological concerns pertaining to 'semantic tasks', Devitt (1989, 1996, 2001) rejects **DR** as implausible. This rejection strikes me as hasty. First, we shouldn't make any serious theoretical decisions on the basis of apparent substitution failures; hard cases, as Kripke (1979a) says, make bad law. Second, it is not clear that (a) and (b) can't, in principle, be removed or legitimately exported to other, nonsemantic, domains. Salmon (1986), Wettstein (1986, 1988, 1989), and Soames (1989) seem to make great strides doing so.

simply contribute individuals to what is expressed. Thus, the adoption of the semantic innocence approach is tantamount to a rejection of **DR**. Once again, prudence dictates that, *ceteris paribus*, we reject the semantic innocence approach.

Minimalism, then, is the default position. As such, the non-minimalist must provide a compelling argument for abandoning the tenets of either **CT** or **DR**. In order to meet his obligations, the non-minimalist might present the argument from entailment.

The argument from entailment, in a nutshell, is this. If nominals do not contribute properties or partially determine reference, then  $(\mathbf{E}_1) - (\mathbf{E}_3)$  are false:

$$\begin{array}{lll} \mathbf{E}_1: [\text{Every } x: Fx] (Gx) & \vDash & [\text{Det}_R x: Fx \ \& \ \text{Exists } x] (Gx). \\ \mathbf{E}_2: [\text{Det}_R x: Fx] (Gx) & \vDash & [\text{Some } x: Fx] (Gx). \\ \mathbf{E}_3: [\text{Det}_R x: Fx] \sim (Fx) & \vDash & P. \end{array}$$

Here,  $\lceil [\text{Det}_R x: Fx] (Gx) \rceil$  is the proposition expressed by an utterance of a sentence-token exemplifying either  $\lceil \text{An}_R F \text{ is } G \rceil$  or  $\lceil \text{The}_R F \text{ is } G \rceil$ . As such,  $(\mathbf{E}_1) - (\mathbf{E}_3)$  are content-based. Now, take  $\mathbf{E}_2$ . If the nominal did not make a robust contribution, then the proposition an utterance of (1) expresses would not semantically entail (2):

1.  $\text{An}_R/\text{The}_R$  murderer is insane.
2.  $[\text{Some } x: \text{murderer } x] (\text{insane } x)$ .

But, according to the non-minimalist, (2) **is** a semantic consequence of the proposition an utterance of (1) expresses. So, it seems, that, at the very least,  $(\mathbf{E}_2)$  holds. Thus, the nominal must make a non-minimal contribution to what is expressed; it must either contribute a property or filter reference. So we must abandon either **CT** or **DR** in their current forms. We must, therefore, abandon minimalism too.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Here's Devitt:

The following argument forms, which are obviously valid when the description is attributive, seem so also when it is referential: 'All **F**s are **G**'; so, if the/an **F** exists it is **G**'; 'The/an **F** is **G**'; so, some **F** is **G**'; 'The/an **F** is **G**'; so something is **F** and **G**'. And statements of the following form

As usual, the minimalist's immediate response is methodological. Crucially, the argument from entailment depends upon the contention that  $(E_1) - (E_3)$  are true. This contention, we believe, is very wobbly. Theoretical intuitions constitute the evidence that supports the contention that  $(E_1) - (E_3)$  obtain. Such intuitions are theory-laden; they are formed within a theoretical framework that maintains that, in misdescription cases, **S** fails to express a (true) proposition. Now, the position that, in misdescription cases, **S** fails to express a (true) proposition is just as controversial as the position that **S** can, in these cases, express a (true) proposition. They're in the same boat. Thus, the 'evidence' that  $(E_1) - (E_3)$  hold is on equal footing with the 'evidence' that they don't. As such, the evidence is far too inconclusive to force one to reject **CT** or **DR**. Minimalism, it appears, escapes unharmed.

The minimalist, however, is not content with mere methodological superiority. He seeks to show that one should be skeptical of non-minimal approaches solely on empirical grounds. To this end, the minimalist offers a *reductio*. The minimalist instructs us to assume that  $(E_1) - (E_3)$  are true. On this assumption, if the argument from entailment is good, then either the filter approach or the semantic innocence approach should adequately account for  $(E_1) - (E_3)$ . Neither approach, the minimalist contends, does so. Thus, the argument from entailment, the minimalist concludes, fails to establish

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seem contradictory: 'The/an **F** is not **F**'. It is hard to see how this could be so if '**F**' were not making a semantic contribution to the referential 'the/an **F**'. (2004: 291). Here, we have two interesting items. First, Devitt qualifies his assertions pertaining to referential descriptions with 'seems'. When discussing quantificational descriptions, the argument forms, Devitt explains, are 'obviously' valid. Second, Devitt assumes that the only semantic contribution that a nominal can make is to filter reference or provide a property. But if we assume, following Devitt, that semantics covers conventional meaning, then it is hard to see why conventionally supplying a supposition in referential contexts wouldn't count as a semantic contribution.

any particular non-minimalism. Accordingly, an adoption of minimalism and subsequent rejection of (E<sub>1</sub>) – (E<sub>3</sub>) seems in order. Let's look at the details.

On the filter approach, an utterance of (1) (i.e. 'An<sub>R</sub>/The<sub>R</sub> murderer is insane. '), if it expresses a proposition at all, expresses a proposition exemplifying (3):

3.  $\lceil \langle o, \text{Insane} \rangle \rceil$ .<sup>54</sup>

However, (3) can be true and (2) false (i.e.  $[\text{Some } x: \text{murderer } x] (\text{insane } x)$ ). For instance,  $\lceil o \rceil$  could be insane in a counterfactual situation where all murderers are perfectly sane.<sup>55</sup> Thus, (3) does not semantically entail (2). On the filter approach, (E<sub>2</sub>) (i.e.  $[\text{Det}_R x: Fx] (Gx) \vDash [\text{Some } x: Fx] (Gx)$ ) does not hold. The filter approach, therefore, cannot account for (E<sub>1</sub>) – (E<sub>3</sub>).

Now, if (1) expresses (3), then, on the filter approach, (4) is true:

4.  $\lceil \langle o, \text{Murderer} \rangle \rceil$ .

For the filter theorist, S's successful use of 'an<sub>R</sub>/the<sub>R</sub> murderer' to refer to  $\lceil o \rceil$  means that  $\lceil o \rceil$  is a murderer. This, however, does not demonstrate that (E<sub>2</sub>) is true. (E<sub>2</sub>), remember, is content-based; it is not about the character of sentences. On the filter approach, (4) demonstrates that if an utterance of (1) expresses a true proposition, then (4) is true, and, thus, so is (2). This, however, is a character trait. In particular, it is a trait regarding the successful use of a referential description in the expression of a true proposition. Essentially, this feature pertains to the rules governing the use of referential

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<sup>54</sup> Interestingly, Devitt maintains that an utterance of (1) expresses a proposition containing a mode of presentation, a sense:

(ii).  $\langle$  The sense of 'an<sub>R</sub>/the<sub>R</sub> murderer', The sense of 'insane'  $\rangle$ .

Accordingly, Devitt must maintain that (ii) semantically entails (2). Devitt, then, must provide a logic of senses containing inference rules that legitimate (E<sub>1</sub>) – (E<sub>3</sub>). No small task, I imagine.

<sup>55</sup> Obviously, this stance presupposes that referential descriptions are rigid designators. For a defense of this position, see 5.1.4.

descriptions. So, on the filter approach, the movement from  $[\text{Det}_R x: Fx] (Gx)$  to  $[\text{Some } x: Fx] (Gx)$  does not reflect the content of  $[\text{Det}_R x: Fx] (Gx)$ ; it reflects the character of  $\lceil \text{An}_R/\text{The}_R F \text{ is } G \rceil$ . So, at best, the filter approach accounts for a **character-based** analog to  $(E_1) - (E_3)$ . The content-based entailments remain without an account.

*Prima facie*, the semantic innocence approach provides an account of  $(E_1) - (E_3)$ . If the semantic innocence approach is correct, then an utterance of (1), when it expresses a proposition, would express a complex proposition exemplifying (5):

5.  $\lceil \langle \langle \langle o, \text{Murderer} \rangle, \langle o, \text{Insane} \rangle \rangle \text{ CONJ} \rangle \rceil$ .

Surely, (5) semantically entails (2). However, the semantic innocence approach is empirically inadequate on independent grounds. As scopal considerations show, the semantic innocence approach is empirically untenable. If the semantic innocence approach were correct, then an utterance of (6) would trigger a scopal ambiguity:

6.  $\text{An}_R/\text{The}_R \text{ murderer is not insane.}$

The utterance, if the semantic innocence approach obtains, is ambiguous between:

7.  $\lceil \langle \langle \langle \langle o, \text{Murderer} \rangle, \langle o, \text{Insane} \rangle \rangle \text{ CONJ} \rangle \text{ NEG} \rangle \rceil$ .  
 8.  $\lceil \langle \langle \langle o, \text{Murderer} \rangle, \langle \langle o, \text{Insane} \rangle \text{ NEG} \rangle \rangle \text{ CONJ} \rangle \rceil$ .

In (7), ‘not’ takes wide scope with respect to the conjunction; in (8), ‘not’ assumes narrow scope. We submit that utterances of sentence-tokens exemplifying (6) do not trigger scopal ambiguities. Such utterances, we maintain, never give rise to readings in which ‘not’ takes wide-scope. An utterance of (6) is never taken to express a true proposition whenever  $\lceil o \rceil$  fails to be a murderer; (7) is not an available reading. Now, the innocent theorist might maintain that, from a semantic perspective, (7) is an available reading. The reading, innocent theorist might claim, is invariably excluded on

nonsemantic – presumably pragmatic – grounds. This, however, seems unconvincing; an ‘available’ reading that never arises is nothing more than an **unavailable reading**.

Nominals, then, do not contribute properties to the proposition expressed when they occur in referential contexts. Semantic innocence fails.<sup>56</sup>

Accordingly, (E<sub>1</sub>) – (E<sub>3</sub>) do not receive an adequate account within non-minimalism. It is best, then, to remain skeptical about the validity of (E<sub>1</sub>) – (E<sub>3</sub>); at this stage, it is best to assume minimalism.

Still, one cannot deny that conversational participants usually infer, say, (2) (i.e. [Some *x*: murderer *x*] (insane *x*)) from the proposition expressed by an utterance of (1) (i.e. ‘An<sub>R</sub>/The<sub>R</sub> murderer is insane.’). Why is this? The explanation, we believe, lies with the cooperative nature of conversation. As a cooperative participant, **S** wants to provide **A** with the quickest **perceptual** route to the individual **S** wishes to discuss. The nominal, we must remember, performs a certain pragmatic function; it normally enables **A** to perceptually identify **S**’s referent in a timely manner. Within referential contexts, the nominal acts as an information pointer. Now, in many circumstances, a nominal that, when outside of referential contexts, accurately describes **S**’s referent clears the quickest path for perceptual identification.<sup>57</sup> **S**, then, will strive to refer to the individual with a referential description that contains such a nominal. Normally, **S** will succeed. Since **A** correctly takes **S** to be a cooperative participant, **A** will normally assume that **S** has chosen a nominal that accurately describes **S**’s referent. Accordingly, **A** will, in many

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<sup>56</sup> Even under the assumption that utterances exemplifying (1) (i.e. ‘An<sub>R</sub>/The<sub>R</sub> murderer is insane.’) do not express conjunctions but rather assert sets of propositions (i.e. {<*o*, Murderer>, <*o*, Insane>}), we can still maintain that the following set is simply unavailable for utterances exemplifying (6):

(iii). {<<*o*, Murderer> NEG>, <<*o*, Insane> NEG>}.

<sup>57</sup> See Donnellan (1966: 182).

circumstances, be in a position to make inferences akin to ( $E_2$ ). These inferences, however, are **nonsemantic**; they are grounded in the **cooperative** aspects of language use. The semanticist need not lose sleep over them.<sup>58</sup>

Let's summarize. **CT** and **DR** demand minimalism. So, we should drop minimalism only if we are willing to drop or modify **CT** or **DR**. We, however, will drop **CT** and **DR** only when presented with a compelling reason for doing so. The non-minimalist views the argument from entailment as such a reason. The argument from entailment, however, is, at best, inconclusive. Furthermore, non-minimalism does not provide an adequate account of the so-called entailments. Accordingly, the argument from entailment does not compel the minimalist to drop or modify **CT** or **DR**. Thus, there is no reason to drop minimalism. Minimalism, as our default position, remains intact. The nominal's only semantic contribution, it seems, is a supposition. At the level of content, the nominal, we maintain, fails to either contribute a property or help determine reference.

#### 4.5 Conclusions

With the discovery that the referential articles are context-sensitive, we identified meaning with Kaplan's notion of character. Later, we located the character of the referential articles within the confines of **FT**. For us, 'a<sub>R</sub>' has **R<sub>ID</sub>** as its character; **R<sub>D</sub>** serves as the character of 'the<sub>R</sub>'. Accordingly, we concluded that 'a<sub>R</sub>' and 'the<sub>R</sub>' compose a semantic contrast set; they do not, however, compose a Horn scale. Afterwards, we

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<sup>58</sup> Within Donnellan, one finds the material for a similar explanation:

There is a presumption that a person who uses a definite description referentially believes that what he wishes to refer to fits the description. Because the purpose of using the description is to get the audience to pick out or think of the right thing or person, one would normally choose a description that he believes the thing or person fits. Normally a misdescription of that to which one wants to refer would mislead the audience. Hence, there is a presumption that the speaker believes **something** fits the description – namely, that to which he refers. (1966: 181). (His emphasis).

argued that the nominal, in referential contexts, plays a minimal role. The nominal, it seems, neither contributes a property to the proposition expressed, nor helps filter reference. Rather, the nominal provides a supposition that the referent in question instantiates the property the nominal, in non-referential contexts, denotes.

With these tasks accomplished, we appear to have provided a complete account of the indefinite/definite contrast. The articles are ambiguous. On their quantificational reading, they contrast in terms of uniqueness: 'the<sub>Q</sub>' entails uniqueness; 'a<sub>Q</sub>' doesn't. On their referential readings, the articles contrast in terms of familiarity: 'a<sub>R</sub>' indicates novelty; 'the<sub>R</sub>' indicates familiarity. By taking Donnellan's distinction seriously, we arrive at a workable explanation of the indefinite/definite contrast. For us, this constitutes the best argument for the semantical import of Donnellan's distinction. In the next and final chapter, we seek to tie up some loose ends pertaining to referential descriptions and anaphoric chains.

## Chapter 5

### Loose Ends: Emptiness, Understanding, Scope, Rigidity, and Chains

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#### 5.0 Introduction

In chapter 3, we demonstrated that the articles are ambiguous between quantificational and referential meanings. In chapter 4, we assimilated the quantificational articles to Russell's quantificational semantics; the referential articles were assimilated to Strawson's heterogeneous familiarity theory. Descriptions, then, form two distinct semantic contrast sets: one quantificational, one referential. The quantificational articles diverge with respect to uniqueness, the referential articles with respect to familiarity. In chapter 5, we continue to explore the nature of referential descriptions. We shall also look afresh at anaphoric chains. This time, however, we do so from the ambiguity theorist's perspective.

Here is our itinerary. In 5.1, we illustrate that referential descriptions instantiate those properties unique to singular terms. First, we demonstrate that utterances of sentence-tokens containing empty referential description-tokens in the subject position fail to express propositions. Next, we show that **A** will understand the proposition expressed by an utterance containing a non-empty referential description-token *iff* **A** can identify **S**'s referent. Afterwards, we argue that referential descriptions don't trigger scopal ambiguity. Finally, following Wettstein, we conclude that referential descriptions are rigid designators. In 5.2, anaphoric chains move to the forefront. First, we provide an account of anaphoric chains containing referential descriptions. Second, we offer a solution to the anaphoric chain problem. And, lastly, we explain the 'antecedent nature' of indefinite descriptions.

## 5.1 Referential Descriptions and Their Properties as Singular Terms

### 5.1.1 Referential Descriptions and 'Incomplete' Propositions

Previously, in 2.1.2, we claimed that an utterance of a sentence-token containing an empty singular term-token in the subject position does not express a proposition. This claim, as we saw, was well confirmed. As ambiguity theorists, we maintain that descriptions, on one reading, are singular terms. Accordingly, we must also maintain that utterances of sentence-tokens containing empty referential description-tokens do not express propositions. But is this the case?

Within the causal theory of reference (CT, hereafter), **S**'s use of a singular term-token is empty *iff* there is no individual that prompts **S**'s usage of the token at hand. Obviously, we need a test for determining when **S**'s usage is unprompted. A natural suggestion emerges. We simply ask **S** what he intended to refer to. If, in retrospect, there is nothing that **S**, as a rational agent, would take as his intended referent, then **S**'s usage was unprompted.<sup>1</sup> Let's call this the 'retrospect test'.

Now, as Donnellan (1966) observes, the referential use of empty description-tokens is extremely rare. Donnellan, however, **seems** to present a case. Sally believes that she sees a man in the distance. Sally also believes that the man she believes she is seeing is quite old. Finally, Sally believes that John can immediately identify what she believes she is seeing under the appropriate supposition. Demonstrating the region of space she believes contains her 'referent', she tells John:

1. The<sub>R</sub> man over there is old.

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<sup>1</sup> As Donnellan explains:

Perhaps I fail to refer in some extreme circumstances, when there is nothing that **I** am willing to pick out as that to which I referred. (1966: 184). (His emphasis).

Immediately after her utterance, Sally discovers that her senses have deceived her. A trick of light causes her perception; there is no man in the distance. In fact, the region of space that Sally demonstrates is empty. It seems that, in retrospect, one might maintain that there is no individual Sally would take as her intended referent. According to the retrospect test, then, no individual prompts Sally to use ‘the<sub>R</sub> man over there’.<sup>2</sup>

So, Sally’s utterance does not express a proposition. At best, she expresses an ‘incomplete’ proposition such as ‘<\_, Old>’. We do not get a complete proposition until the unary function the predicate ‘is old’ denotes, the ‘OLD function’, receives an argument. The referential description-token ought to contribute the argument. In this case, however, the token is empty. So, the OLD function remains open; Sally does not express a proposition. As we see, an utterance of a sentence-token containing an empty referential definite description-token does not express a proposition.

The same holds for utterances containing empty referential indefinite description-tokens. Let’s slightly alter the above scenario. Unlike before, Sally expects that John cannot immediately identify what she believes she sees. Being a competent speaker of

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<sup>2</sup> One might, of course, maintain that Sally actually refers to the trick of light; that is, that the trick of light, or something akin to it, prompts her usage of the referential description. Interestingly, this seems to be another instance of what Devitt and Sterelny (1997) label the ‘**qua**-problem’. Naturally, this problem demands one’s undivided attention. Though my attention is somewhat divided, I, myself, believe that what prompts **S** to use a singular term to refer is **almost** wholly anchored in **S**’s primary referential intention to refer to an individual under a particular supposition. So, in the current case, Sally did not refer to the trick of light because her primary referential intention was to refer to a flesh and blood person under the supposition that **he** was somewhere in the distance. In this endeavor, she unfortunately failed. On this issue, I keep good company. Here’s Wettstein:

The week before final exams is a very busy time. Some student or other is always waiting to see me. One day during this hectic period, after an hour of seeing students, I mused, nodding toward the door, ‘This one probably wants an incomplete’ (taking for granted that the individual in question was a graduate student). I was mistaken, however, for there was no student outside my door. Does the expression ‘this one’ refer in such a case? It is surely plausible to suppose that it does not. Who but a Meinongian would suppose otherwise? (1984: 59).

Wettstein did not refer because his primary referential intention was to refer to an individual – a graduate student – and none happened to cause his use of ‘this one’.

English, Sally employs ‘a<sub>R</sub> man far away from me’ to refer to what she believes she is seeing. Here, too, the token is empty. In retrospect, nothing prompts Sally’s usage. Once again, the OLD function remains open. Once again, Sally does not express a proposition.

Utterances of sentence-tokens containing empty referential description-tokens, then, do not express propositions. In this respect, at least, referential descriptions and uncontroversial singular terms converge. Let’s now turn to understanding.

### *5.1.2 Referential Descriptions and Understanding*

In 2.1.2, we held that a person can understand a proposition only if the person is acquainted with the constituents composing the proposition. In order to understand a singular proposition, then, a person must be appropriately acquainted with the logical subject of the proposition. The person must be able to identify the logical subject as the referent of the singular term.<sup>3</sup> This, we take it, is commonplace. Referential descriptions, we shall maintain, assimilate to this picture. In order to understand the proposition expressed by an utterance of a sentence-token containing a referential description-token, **A** must identify **the token**’s content as **S**’s referent. If **A** fails to do so, he will also fail to understand the proposition expressed.

On our account, **S** uses a referential indefinite description when he wishes to refer to an individual he expects **A** cannot **immediately identify** in the appropriate manner.<sup>4</sup> Of course, the individual, ‘*o*’, is a constituent of the singular proposition **S** expresses. Now,

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<sup>3</sup> In 4.3.2, ‘identification’ received a causal-based treatment:

A person identifies the referent of a singular term as the referent of that term *iff* the person’s use of the singular term is causally grounded in the referent.  
For further details, consult 2.1.2 and 4.3.2.

<sup>4</sup> Immediate identification, remember, requires that **A could have**, prior to **S**’s utterance, successfully referred to ‘*o*’ by the singular term **S** employed. For a detailed discussion see 4.3.3.3.

if **A** meets **S**'s expectations, then **A** could not have referred to  $\lceil o \rceil$  with the description prior to **S**'s utterance. Suppose this is the case; suppose that **A** and  $\lceil o \rceil$  are, prior to **S**'s utterance, causally isolated. One might, then, be tempted to conclude that whenever **A** meets **S**'s expectations, **A** will fail to understand the proposition expressed. Surely, this failure would make communication with referential indefinite descriptions impossible. Thus, one might be further tempted; one might conclude that **R<sub>ID</sub>** is not the character of ' $a_R$ ' or, worse yet, that referential indefinite descriptions do not exist.<sup>5</sup> In either case, the ambiguity thesis (**AT**, hereafter) is in deep trouble.<sup>6</sup>

Luckily, the lessons of **CT** allow us to quell these temptations. Within **CT**, **S**'s use of the referential indefinite description-token causally links the attentive audience to  $\lceil o \rceil$ . Here, the attentive audience receives, from **S**, the ability to refer to  $\lceil o \rceil$  under various suppositions. **A** engages in reference borrowing. As a result of hearing **S**'s utterance, **A** can successfully refer to  $\lceil o \rceil$  under various suppositions. Accordingly, **A** can identify  $\lceil o \rceil$  under the supposition in question. Appearances notwithstanding, then, **A** can understand the proposition **S** expresses despite **A**'s inability to immediately identify  $\lceil o \rceil$  under the supposition that  $\lceil o \rceil$  instantiates some property. Reference borrowing makes successful communication with referential indefinite descriptions possible.

In fact, understanding the use of referential indefinite descriptions is, in principle, no different from understanding the first use of some proper names. Consider John again. Prior to taking his first philosophy class, John did not have the ability to refer to Hume by

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<sup>5</sup> In 4.3.3, we provided the following analysis:  
**(R<sub>ID</sub>) The Character of ' $a_R$ '**. Utter a token exemplifying  $\lceil an_R F \rceil$  to refer to  $\lceil o \rceil$  in  $\lceil C \rceil$  only if you expect that **A** cannot immediately identify  $\lceil o \rceil$  as your referent under the supposition that  $\lceil o \rceil$  is an  $\lceil F \rceil$  in  $\lceil C \rceil$ .

<sup>6</sup> Ludlow and Neale (1991), and Bach (2004) use similar arguments to demonstrate that indefinite descriptions are not ambiguous between a quantificational and referential reading.

using ‘Hume’-token. John could not immediately identify Hume as the referent of ‘Hume’. During his first philosophy lecture, John hears ‘Hume’ for the first time. As a result, John and Hume become causally linked. Furthermore, John gains the ability to use ‘Hume’-tokens to refer to Hume. Obviously, then, John can identify Hume as the referent of ‘Hume’. He can, *ceteris paribus*, understand propositions expressed by utterances containing ‘Hume’-tokens.<sup>7</sup>

Now, consider referential definite descriptions. If **S** felicitously uses a referential definite description-token to refer to ‘*o*’ and **A** meets **S**’s expectations, then **A** has the ability to refer to ‘*o*’ with the referential definite description. **A**, then, can identify ‘*o*’. **A** is in a position to understand the proposition **S** expresses. **A**, of course, might be able to refer to numerous individuals by his use of the referential description in question. Accordingly, successful identification requires **A** to locate **S**’s referent. This, however, is no real stumbling block; it is quite similar to the situation **A** faces with ‘ambiguous’ names. Here, as elsewhere, **A** must decipher what **S** means in the communicative context at hand.<sup>8</sup> Only in this manner will **A** successfully identify **S**’s referent.

So, referential descriptions assimilate to our picture of understanding as well as proper names do. That is, referential descriptions conform to our picture of

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<sup>7</sup> As Devitt observes:

Some philosophers have a different view of indefinites, treating a use that accords with what I have just described as the convention for referential indefinites **not** as referential at all but rather as ‘specific’. They urge this treatment because even though **S** communicates that he has a certain individual in mind, **S** does not intend **A** to identify it and so does not convey a singular proposition. I think this misdescribes the missing intention. **S** lacks the intention that **A** should identify the object that **S** has in mind with one that **A** has in mind **independently**. But **A** can **borrow the reference**... Similarly, someone with no independent capacities to refer to Catiline or elms can borrow these capacities from a speaker’s use of ‘Catiline’ and ‘elm’. (2004: 293). (His emphasis).

<sup>8</sup> See Devitt (1974, 1981a).

understanding rather well. Understanding, then, presents no serious obstacle to **AT** or our semantic analysis of the referential articles. Neither, as we shall see, does scope.

### 5.1.3 Referential Descriptions and Scope

Singular terms, let's remind ourselves, do not trigger scopal ambiguity.<sup>9</sup> Consider (A) and (B):

(A)  $\lceil \Phi x \text{ is insane} \rceil$ .

(B)  $\lceil x \text{ is } \Phi \text{ insane} \rceil$ .

Here we have two open sentences; each open sentence contains two variables: a **DP** variable,  $\lceil x \rceil$ , and an operator variable,  $\lceil \Phi \rceil$ . In (A),  $\lceil \Phi \rceil$  takes wide scope with respect to the open sentence  $\lceil x \text{ is insane} \rceil$ . In (B),  $\lceil \Phi \rceil$  takes narrow scope with respect to the open sentence; it immediately scopes over the predicate 'is insane'. Whenever we replace  $\lceil x \rceil$  by a singular term and  $\lceil \Phi \rceil$  by any appropriate operator in either (A) or (B), we construct sentences whose tokens, when uttered, express equivalent propositions. Replacing  $\lceil x \rceil$  by 'Jones' and substituting  $\lceil \Phi \rceil$  for 'not' in (A) and (B), we produce sentences whose tokens, when uttered, express (2):

2.  $\langle\langle \text{Jones, Insane} \rangle \text{ NEG} \rangle$ .

It is in this sense that singular terms are 'scopeless'; they do not trigger scopal ambiguity when they replace  $\lceil x \rceil$  in (A) and (B).

As singular terms, referential descriptions must also be scopeless. And, of course, they are. Let's replace  $\lceil x \rceil$  with 'a<sub>R</sub> murderer' in (A) and (B); we, once again, replace  $\lceil \Phi \rceil$  with 'not'. After these replacements, Sally utters a token of (A); Mary utters a token of (B). Both speakers use the referential description to refer to Jones. Each utterance,

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<sup>9</sup> For a refresher, see 2.1.2. In that section, we presented the view that singular terms do not trigger scopal ambiguity.

then, expresses the same proposition; each utterance expresses (2). Referential definite descriptions are no different. When we replace  $\ulcorner x \urcorner$  with ‘the<sub>R</sub> murderer’ in (A) and (B) we do not trigger scopal ambiguity. If Sally utters (A), Mary utters (B), and each speaker’s referent is Jones, both utterances express (2). Notice, these results do not differ when we replace  $\ulcorner \Phi \urcorner$  with ‘intensional’ operators, such as ‘possibly’ and ‘presently’. As Fodor and Sag vividly explain, referential descriptions:

‘Shine through’ the scope of quantifiers, negation, modal operators and the like, and do not participate in the network of scope relations holding between these scoped elements. (1982: 506).

The ability to ‘shine through’ as well as to avoid participation in the scopal relations of scoped operators closes referential descriptions to various interpretations. Specifically, utterances of sentence-tokens of (A) completed by referential descriptions do not have a parallel to the narrow scope reading quantification descriptions can trigger in the same syntactic environment.<sup>10</sup> Unlike utterances containing quantificational description-tokens in the subject position, utterances containing referential description-tokens do not express true propositions whenever the token is empty. This is a welcomed outcome. Utterances containing empty referential description-tokens in the subject position do not express propositions at all. Thus, they shouldn’t express true ones.

#### *5.1.4 Referential Descriptions and Rigidity*

We now turn to our final property: rigidity. Earlier, in 2.1.2, we maintained that all singular terms are rigid designators.<sup>11</sup> According to **AT**, referential descriptions are

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<sup>10</sup> See Larson and Segal (1995) as well.

<sup>11</sup> In 2.1.2, the following definition of ‘rigid designator’ surfaced:  
 $\ulcorner t \urcorner$  is a rigid designator in  $\ulcorner \mathbf{L} \urcorner$  iff in every counterfactual situation in which  $o$  exists,  $t$  designates  $o$  in  $\mathbf{L}$  and  $t$  never designates any other object in  $\mathbf{L}$ .  
 Soon we will revise this definition.

singular terms. So, we must also hold that referential descriptions are rigid designators.

And, here, we encounter the Wettstein-Salmon debate.

As an ambiguity theorist, Wettstein (1981, 1983) maintains that referential descriptions are rigid designators. Naturally, this stance has consequences. Using ‘the<sub>R</sub> man who murdered Smith’ to refer to Jones, Sally asserts (3):

3. The<sub>R</sub> man who murdered Smith is insane.

Thus, Sally expresses (4):

4. <Jones, Insane>.

In order to avoid numerous controversies, assume Jones, the actual man who murdered Smith, is insane. Call this context, ‘CS<sub>0</sub>’. Relative to CS<sub>0</sub>, Sally expresses a true proposition.<sup>12</sup> Now, if referential descriptions are rigid designators, then, in every counterfactual situation in which Jones is insane, (4) is true. Thus, Sally’s utterance at CS<sub>0</sub> expresses a true proposition in CS<sub>1</sub> – CS<sub>4</sub>:

- CS<sub>1</sub>: Bill, not Jones, murders Smith; Bill is sane; Jones is insane.
- CS<sub>2</sub>: Smith is not murdered at all; Jones is insane.
- CS<sub>3</sub>: Smith doesn’t exist; Jones is insane.
- CS<sub>4</sub>: No murderers exist; Jones is insane.

Wettstein readily accepts these consequences; he holds that (3), as uttered in CS<sub>0</sub>, expresses a proposition that is true in CS<sub>1</sub> – CS<sub>4</sub>.<sup>13</sup>

Salmon (1982, 1991), a dedicated Russellian, dissents. According to Salmon, Wettstein’s position is counterintuitive.<sup>14</sup> As Salmon explains:

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<sup>12</sup> We, of course, hold that even if in CS<sub>0</sub> Jones is not a murderer an utterance of (3) might express (4), which is true *iff* Jones is insane.

<sup>13</sup> Reimer (1998c: 141) concurs.

<sup>14</sup> Neale (1990) and Devitt (2004) share this assessment.

It seems quite clear...that the sentence ‘The murderer is insane’ [as used on this occasion] is not true with respect to [ $CS_1 - CS_4$ ], and indeed, it seems quite clear that the phrase ‘the murderer’ does not denote anyone, not even Jones, with respect to such a world. (1982: 42 – 43).<sup>15</sup>

Armed with his intuitions, Salmon presents the argument from rigidity. If referential descriptions exist, Salmon tells us, then such descriptions must be rigid designators. If referential descriptions were rigid designators, then the proposition expressed by an utterance of (3) (i.e. ‘The<sub>R</sub> man who murdered Smith is insane.’) with respect to  $CS_0$  would also be true in  $CS_1 - CS_4$ . But the latter claim, Salmon reminds us, **seems** questionable. So, Salmon concludes, referential descriptions aren’t rigid designators. Accordingly, there aren’t referential descriptions at all. Russell vindicated!

Well, not really. So far, we simply have intuition mongering. Surely, such musings aren’t enough.

From a methodological perspective, Salmon’s rigidity argument extends well beyond descriptions.<sup>16</sup> Remember, complex demonstratives and deictic pronouns are singular

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<sup>15</sup> Salmon, as we can see, frames the issue with respect to sentences on occasions of use. Wettstein argues that this is improper:

It is a mistake to ask whether the sentence ‘The murderer is insane’, as used on the occasion in question, would be true or false in a world in which there were no murders. I am not committed to any answer whatever to that question in virtue of my views about referentially used descriptions. I am committed to the view that the **singular proposition** determined in the context in question is true in a possible world just in case Jones, the actual murderer, is insane in that world, whether or not he (or anyone else) committed a murder in that world. This, however, does not seem objectionable once we become clear that the object of such counterfactual evaluation is not a piece of language (as used on a certain occasion) but a content, in this case a singular proposition. (1983: 193). (His emphasis).

See Neale (1990), Salmon (1991), Ostertag (1998), Reimer (1998c), Nelson (1999), and Devitt (2004) for further discussion.

<sup>16</sup> As Wettstein notes:

Salmon’s argument, then, if sound, is very powerful. It would show not only that I am wrong about referential definite descriptions, but that Kaplan, John Perry, I, and others are wrong about deictic pronouns [being singular terms]. (1983: 192).

See Ostertag (1998), Reimer (1998c) Nelson (1999), and Devitt (2004) as well.

terms. So, if singular terms are rigid designators, then complex demonstratives and deictic pronouns should also be rigid designators.

First, consider complex demonstratives. Take (5):

5. That murderer is insane.

In  $CS_0$ , Sally utters (5); she uses ‘that murderer’ to refer to Jones. As such, she expresses (4) (i.e.  $\langle \text{Jones, Insane} \rangle$ ). For consistency’s sake, Salmon must claim that the proposition Sally’s utterance expresses in  $CS_0$  is not true when evaluated in  $CS_1 - CS_4$ . Accordingly, complex demonstratives are nonrigid.

Now take deictic pronouns. Referring to Jones, Sally says:

6. He is insane.

Sally, once again, expresses (4). Jones, as we all know, is both male and insane. So, the proposition Sally’s utterance expresses is uncontroversially true. After his release from prison, Jones gets a sex change; he is no longer male. Jones, however, remains insane. Let’s tag this counterfactual situation ‘ $CS_5$ ’. If deictic pronouns are rigid designators, then the proposition Sally’s utterance of (6) expresses in  $CS_0$  is true in  $CS_5$ . Again, Salmon should maintain that (4) is not true in  $CS_5$ . So, deictic pronouns are nonrigid too.

Salmon’s argument from rigidity, then, extends to complex demonstratives and deictic pronouns. As such, Salmon has two options. Salmon can either accept that complex demonstratives and deictic pronouns are not singular terms or he can conclude that some singular terms are nonrigid. The former option is rather revisionist. It overturns well-established semantic doctrines. This option certainly requires more than Salmon’s controversial intuitions. So, if he establishes anything at all, Salmon establishes that some singular terms are nonrigid designators. But this meager conclusion

does not vindicate Russell. **AT**, on a certain reading, is compatible with this view. The ambiguity theorist can hold that referential descriptions, like complex demonstratives and deictic pronouns, are nonrigid singular terms.<sup>17</sup> We, however, will forgo this option. Instead, we shall plead Wettstein's case.

As we have seen, referential descriptions, like complex demonstratives and deictic pronouns, are context-sensitive expressions. Now, some context-sensitive expressions are rigid designators. For instance, 'I' is a rigid designator. Sally's utterance of 'I am hungry' expresses '<Sally, Hungry>'. Here, the 'I'-token designates Sally. In every counterfactual situation where Sally is hungry, her utterance expresses a true proposition. Accordingly, we need a definition of rigid designation that covers the essential indexical; we need a formulation that incorporates context-sensitivity.

Kaplan (1978b, 1989a, 1989b) provides the requisite formulation. Once again, let  $\lceil \zeta_u \rceil$  stand for an utterance  $\lceil u \rceil$  of the expression-token  $\lceil \zeta \rceil$ .  $\lceil \zeta \rceil$ , in turn, is a token of the expression  $\lceil e \rceil$ . Now, suppose  $\lceil c \rceil$  is the content of  $\lceil \zeta_u \rceil$ . According to Kaplan, an expression  $\lceil e \rceil$  is a rigid designator in  $\lceil \mathbf{L} \rceil$  *iff* when assigned to  $\zeta_u$  in  $\mathbf{L}$ ,  $c$  designates the same individual in  $\mathbf{L}$  at every counterfactual situation in which the individual exists and never designates any other individual in  $\mathbf{L}$ . Kaplan picturesquely describes the formulation:

If the individual is loaded into the proposition (to serve as the propositional component) before the proposition begins its round-the-worlds journey, it is

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<sup>17</sup> Devitt takes this path. **AT**, we are told:

Does not require that a referential definite be rigid...but rather 'weakly rigid' according to the following definition: *e* is weakly rigid *iff* it designates the same object in every possible world in which that object exists **and any descriptive element of *e* applies to that object**. ...So what I have argued for definites [i.e. that they are weakly rigid] should apply also to demonstratives. And so it does: 'that **F**' is not rigid but only weakly rigid. Had the speaker in Donnellan's example said 'That murderer is insane', her remark would have been no more true in the possible worlds Salmon describes than was 'The murderer is insane'. (2004: 296). (His emphasis).

hardly surprising that the proposition manages to find that same individual at all of its stops. ... In this way we achieve rigid designation. (1989b: 569).<sup>18</sup>

Applying Kaplan's definition, we can hold that 'I' is a rigid designator. In our example, Sally serves as the content of Sally's utterance of an 'I'-token. After its assignment, the content of Sally's utterance of the 'I'-token designates Sally in every counterfactual situation in which she exists but never designates anyone else. Kaplan's analysis also captures the nonrigidity of quantifier phrases. Consider (7):

7. Every linguist smokes.

An utterance of (7) expresses:

8. [Every  $x$ : linguist  $x$ ] (smokes  $x$ ).

Suppose our world contains just one linguist, namely Robert. In this case, the content of the utterance of the 'every linguist'-token, namely [Every  $x$ : linguist  $x$ ], designates Robert. Another counterfactual situation, however, might contain two linguists: Robert and Michael. Here, the content of the utterance has a different designation, namely Robert and Michael. Accordingly, 'every linguist' is a nonrigid designator.

Now, Kaplan's definition of rigid designation entails the rigidity of referential descriptions. The content of Sally's utterance of a token of the referential description, 'a<sub>R</sub>/the<sub>R</sub> man who murdered Smith', is Jones. Jones is loaded into the proposition before it begins its counterfactual journey. As such, Jones will serve as the designation of the referential description at every stop where he exists. Referential descriptions are rigid after all. The same holds for 'that man who murdered Smith' and 'he'. Thus, Kaplan's

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<sup>18</sup> Kaplan maintains that a rigid designator refers to the same individual even in counterfactual situations in which that individual does not exist. Like Kripke, I wish to remain neutral on this issue. As such, I have provided a neutral definition as well as left out the section of the quotation pertaining to that controversial stance.

formulation also entails that complex demonstratives and deictic pronouns are rigid designators. Sally's utterance of 'a<sub>R</sub>/the<sub>R</sub>/that man who murdered Smith/ he is insane' in CS<sub>0</sub>, then, expresses a proposition that is true in CS<sub>1</sub> – CS<sub>5</sub>. Winner: Wettstein.

Referential descriptions, then, exhibit every property singular terms exhibit. Referential descriptions are rigid designators. Referential descriptions are scopeless. **A** cannot understand the proposition expressed by an utterance of a sentence-token containing a referential description-token unless **A** can identify its content. Lastly, utterances of sentence-tokens containing empty referential description-tokens in the subject position fail to express propositions. In each respect, referential descriptions diverge from their quantificational counterparts. Thus, each property serves to confirm **AT**.

## **5.2 A Familiar Topic: Anaphoric Chains**

We now move to a familiar topic: anaphoric chains. Here, we face three tasks. First, an adequate account of anaphoric chains wholly composed of referential descriptions must be provided. Second, a proper solution to the anaphoric chain problem must be given. And, finally, the 'antecedent nature' of both quantificational and referential indefinite descriptions must be satisfactorily addressed. We begin with the former.

### *5.2.1 An Ambiguity-Based Account of Anaphoric Chains*

In 2.4, we observed that any plausible account of anaphoric chains must meet two requirements. First, a plausible account must provide adequate truth-conditions for the propositions expressed by utterances linked by anaphoric chains. In particular, one must explain how such propositions could, in some circumstances, be true together. Second, a

plausible account must explain why anaphoric chains are ‘about’ the same individual. Here, one should explain how speakers employ anaphoric chains to talk about the same individual.

Before looking at the ambiguity theorist’s account of anaphoric chains, we should stop to introduce some terminology. We shall label those anaphoric chains made entirely out of referential description-tokens, ‘referential anaphoric chains’. Those chains composed completely out of quantificational description-tokens, we shall call ‘quantificational anaphoric chains’. And, finally, those chains made from both quantificational and referential description-tokens shall be labeled ‘mixed anaphoric chains’.

Now, intuitively, **AT** meets the two requirements above with respect to referential anaphoric chains. Take (1):

1.  $A_R$  man<sup>1</sup> was jogging. The<sub>R</sub> man<sub>1</sub> looked tired.

Surely, the antecedent and anaphoric propositions can, in some circumstances, be true together. The ambiguity theorist can easily account for this fact. Suppose that John serves as the content of an utterance of ‘ $a_R$  man’. According to **AT**, an utterance of the antecedent sentence-token expresses the singular proposition:

2. <John, Eating>.

In (1), the anaphoric referential definite description inherits its referent from the antecedent indefinite description. So, an utterance of the anaphoric sentence-token expresses the singular proposition:

3. <<John, Tired> Looked>.

Accordingly, the antecedent and anaphoric propositions are true together *iff* John was jogging and he looked tired.<sup>19</sup>

For the ambiguity theorist, then, utterances of (1) are ‘about’ the same person in an obviously transparent manner. Both the antecedent proposition and the anaphoric proposition contain the same logical subject. As such, utterances of (1) are simply ‘about’ the shared logical subject of both propositions. In the current case, the utterances are about John.<sup>20</sup>

So, **AT** meets both requirements. **AT**, then, provides a plausible account of referential anaphoric chains. The ambiguity theorist, of course, is free to apply the dedicated Russellian’s account of description-based anaphoric chains to quantificational anaphoric chains. Thus, **AT** also provides a plausible account of quantificational anaphoric chains. Can **AT** also provide a plausible solution to the anaphoric chain problem? Absolutely!

### 5.2.2 Solving the Anaphoric Chain Problem

In 2.4.3, we encountered the anaphoric chain problem. The problem, to repeat, is this:

**(AP) *The Anaphoric Chain Problem.*** Why can an audience understand an utterance of a sentence-token containing an anaphoric chain that an indefinite

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<sup>19</sup> Obviously, we are abstracting from tense and temporal ordering. At this juncture, such oversights can be forgiven.

<sup>20</sup> On this Strawson-inspired account, ‘elliptical’ contradiction is avoided. Take the following dialogue:

Sally: A man<sup>1</sup> fell out the window<sup>2</sup>.

Mary: Fell!?! The man<sub>1</sub> didn’t fall.

John: Right! He<sub>1</sub> was thrown out the window<sub>2</sub>.

Suppose Sally uses ‘a man’<sup>1</sup> to refer to John and she uses ‘the window’<sup>2</sup> to refer to *o*. In that case, Mary expresses the singular proposition:

(i). <<<John, *a*> Fell-out> NEG>.

Mary, then, doesn’t contradict herself. In contrast to his Russellian rival, the ambiguity theorist need not implausibly maintain that Mary uses elliptical nominals ironically. So, once again, the ambiguity theorist trumps the dedicated Russellian. See 2.4.2, particularly fn. 42, for some background.

description initiates and a definite description continues but fail to understand an utterance of a sentence-token containing an 'equivalent' definite description in the same context?

**AP**, remember, arises within a purely Russellian framework. According to the dedicated Russellian, the conjunction of the propositions expressed by an utterance of (4a) and (4b) is equivalent to the proposition expressed by an utterance of (5).

4. (a) A man I work with loves coconuts. (b) The guy would be happy here.

5. The man I work with who loves coconuts would be happy here.

In some cases, however, **S**'s utterance of (5) is infelicitous and unintelligible even though **S**'s utterance of (4) is perfectly felicitous and completely understandable. Take, once more, the deserted island case from 2.4.3. John and Sally meet for the first time on a deserted island which is covered with coconuts trees. Thinking of Jones, his coconut-loving colleague, John breaks the ice with (4). Here, John's utterance is entirely felicitous. Sally, it seems, has no particular trouble understanding John. Had he uttered (5), however, John's utterance would've been utterly infelicitous. Moreover, Sally wouldn't have understood what John had said. She would've, for example, given a 'huh'-response. In turn, Sally would've asked for clarification; she would've wanted to know what individual John had in mind.

Now, the Russellian appears unable to explain the divergence in these two cases. The ambiguity theorist, however, can provide a straightforward account. In the deserted island case, Jones prompts John's usage of the descriptions. The descriptions, then, are referential. Now, John and Sally are strangers. So, each person mutually expects that the other is causally isolated from numerous individuals in their lives. John, as is the case, expects that Sally cannot immediately identify Jones under the supposition that he is a

man whom John works with and loves coconuts. After all, John expects that Sally cannot identify Jones period. So, if John wants to talk about Jones, he must use a referential indefinite description.<sup>21</sup> The use of a referential definite description would be infelicitous; such usage violates **R<sub>D</sub>**.<sup>22</sup>

On the interpretative side, when Sally hears (5), she expects John expects she can immediately identify John's referent under the supposition that the referent is a colleague of John's who loves coconuts. Sally, however, does not share John's expectation; she doesn't think that she can immediately identify John's referent. Furthermore, she can't engage in reference borrowing; **R<sub>D</sub>** blocks this move.<sup>23</sup> Sally, then, must seek clarification. Accordingly, communication fails.

Now, one might wonder why the anaphoric utterance in (4) (i.e. 'A man I work with loves coconuts. The guy would be happy here.') is felicitous. Again, our **AT** provides a straightforward account. John utters the antecedent sentence. Upon hearing the utterance, Sally gains the ability to refer to Jones under various suppositions. This, remember, is reference borrowing. John knows that Sally can now successfully refer to Jones under various suppositions. John, then, expects that Sally can do so. Here, the use of a referential indefinite description would be infelicitous; it would violate **R<sub>ID</sub>**. So, if John wants to continue to talk about Jones via referential descriptions, he must employ an appropriate referential definite description. In (4), John does just that. John's utterance,

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<sup>21</sup> He could, of course, use a complex demonstrative such as 'this person back home'.

<sup>22</sup> That is, it violates the character of 'the<sub>R</sub>':  
**(R<sub>D</sub>) The Character of 'the<sub>R</sub>'**. Utter a token exemplifying 'the<sub>R</sub> F' to refer to 'o' in 'C' only if you expect that A can immediately identify 'o' as your referent under the supposition that 'o' is an 'F' in 'C'.

<sup>23</sup> For background, see 4.3.3.3.

then, is felicitous because his usage conforms to  $\mathbf{R}_{ID}$  and  $\mathbf{R}_D$ . As such, communication succeeds.

So, the ambiguity theorist provides a plausible account of referential anaphoric chains and quantificational anaphoric chains. Furthermore, the ambiguity theorist solves **AP**. The ambiguity theorist, then, disposes of a problem that plagues the dedicated Russellian. Furthermore, the ambiguity theorist, as we saw above, provides a more plausible analysis of ‘elliptical’ contradiction than his Russellian rival. And, finally, if mixed anaphoric chains exist, we should expect that only the ambiguity theorist could provide an account of them. As such, the ambiguity theorist’s account of description-based anaphoric chains surpasses the dedicated Russellian’s account. Once again, **AT** exceeds its Russellian rival.

### *5.2.3 Indefinite Descriptions’ ‘Antecedent Nature’*

In 1.3.2, we closed with the following observation. In contrast to definite descriptions, indefinite descriptions cannot function as anaphors. Within **AT**, this observation takes on a different significance. The ambiguity theorist, it seems, must maintain that both referential indefinite descriptions and quantificational indefinite descriptions cannot serve as anaphors. Each kind of indefinite description is, as it were, an antecedent by nature; each has an ‘antecedent nature’. But why should this be?

The antecedent nature of referential indefinite descriptions is relatively easy to explain. In a certain sense, the antecedent nature of referential indefinite descriptions is written into the semantics of ‘ $a_R$ ’. The referential indefinite article indicates that **A** is unfamiliar with the referent of the indefinite description-token under some particular presupposition. That is, **S** felicitously uses a referential indefinite description-token only

if **S** uses it to introduce a novel referent. As such, the token cannot properly be co-indexed with some previous token. Such usage would violate **R<sub>ID</sub>**; the referent of the description would be familiar, not novel. Consequently, referential indefinite descriptions cannot be anaphors; they must be antecedents.

With quantificational indefinite descriptions, matters are more complicated. The antecedent nature of quantificational indefinite descriptions, it seems, is not dictated by the semantics of ‘a<sub>Q</sub>’. Rather, the antecedent nature of quantificational indefinite descriptions seems to be a result of certain considerations pertaining to the cooperative nature of conversation. Their antecedent nature, it seems, has its origins in pragmatics. To see this, consider the following cases:

- C*<sub>1</sub>: **S** attempts to coordinate a token of ‘an<sub>Q</sub> F’ with a token of ‘the<sub>Q</sub> F’.<sup>1</sup>  
*C*<sub>2</sub>: **S** attempts to coordinate a token of ‘an<sub>Q</sub> F’ with a token of ‘an<sub>Q</sub> F’.<sup>1</sup>

Now, in *C*<sub>1</sub>, **S** sins against the quantity maxim.<sup>24</sup> As Russell taught us, ‘the<sub>Q</sub>’ denotes the DEF. function, ‘a<sub>Q</sub>’ the INDEF. function.<sup>25</sup> So, in *C*<sub>1</sub>, **S**’s attempt at coordinating is equivalent to his attempt to sincerely assert that there is one and only one individual satisfying ‘F’ and then later to put forth the equally sincere, though less informative, assertion that there is at least one such individual. Obviously, this conversational move is terribly uncooperative. As such, one should avoid it in cooperative conversational exchanges. On conversational grounds, then, the quantificational indefinite description in *C*<sub>1</sub> cannot be construed, properly, at least, as an anaphor.

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<sup>24</sup> The quantity maxim, let’s remind ourselves, is this:

**Quantity Maxim:** Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange). Do not make your contribution more informative than is required. See 3.3.1 for further details.

<sup>25</sup> See 2.2.1 for details.

Now, what about  $C_2$ ? Here, **S** seems, once again, to transgress against the quantity maxim. **S** initiates his conversational exchange with a singular **DP**, namely  $\lceil \text{an}_Q F \rceil$ . As a cooperative participant, then, **S**'s grounds for usage must be that while he believes that there is at least one individual satisfying the property  $\lceil F \rceil$  denotes, he doesn't believe that there are at least two such individuals. Otherwise, he would have employed a plural quantifier phrase like, say,  $\lceil \text{some } Fs \rceil$ . Accordingly, **S** generates the generalized conversational implicature that he believes that there is one and only one individual that has the property in question.<sup>26</sup> Were **S**, then, to attempt to construct an anaphoric chain by employing a second quantificational indefinite description, he would assert something conversationally weaker than he implicates. This, of course, would violate the quantity maxim.<sup>27</sup> In order to avoid such a transgression, **S** must employ a singular quantificational definite description or something akin to it.<sup>28</sup>

So, in each case, a quantificational indefinite description cannot be an anaphor. Neither, as we have seen, can referential indefinite descriptions. Simply put, indefinite descriptions aren't anaphors. For referential indefinite descriptions, this is semantic fact; for quantificational indefinite descriptions, it is chiefly a pragmatic one.

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<sup>26</sup> See 3.3.1 for details.

<sup>27</sup> See Ludlow and Segal (2004) as well.

<sup>28</sup> Note, however, that 'one and only one' cannot properly be coordinated with a quantificational indefinite description. For example, an utterance of (ii) is utterly infelicitous:

(ii).  $A_Q \text{man}^1$  was eating lobster. One and only one  $\text{man}_1$  dropped butter on the floor. One reason for this, I suspect, involves the manner maxim. Since 'the<sub>Q</sub>' is briefer than 'one and only one', a cooperative conversational participant must, in such cases, employ the former in order to avoid violating the manner maxim.

### 5.3 Conclusions

Let's summarize. As we demonstrated in 5.1, referential descriptions do indeed operate like singular terms. In particular, they are rigid, scopeless expressions. In order for **A** to understand the proposition expressed by **S**'s utterance of a sentence-token containing a referential description-token, **A** must be able to identify **S**'s referent as the referent of that token. And, finally, empty referential description-tokens cannot be used to express propositions. In 5.2, we turned our attention upon anaphoric chains. There, we provided an account of anaphoric chains. We also sketched a solution to **AP** as well as explained the antecedent nature of both quantificational and referential indefinite descriptions.

These arguments, accounts, and explanations, it seems, further highlight **AT**'s descriptive and explanatory power. Perhaps, with future development, they might serve as a pathway to **AT**'s wider acceptance among philosophers, linguists, and logicians.

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