

**SINGULAR TERMS, REFERENCE AND METHODOLOGY
IN SEMANTICS¹**

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Names, pronouns, indexicals, and demonstratives (including complex demonstratives—e.g. ‘that dog’) are often conventionally used to designate individuals.² For ease of exposition, let’s mark this point by calling such expressions *singular terms*, not intending by so doing to prejudge the question of whether they have anything interesting in common semantically. Some uses of each kind of singular term at least appear to semantically refer to the individuals designated, and so contribute them to propositions expressed (in the contexts in question) by the sentences they occur in. But each kind of singular term has other uses that don’t seem to be referring uses at all; that is, the uses don’t appear to contribute individuals to propositions. The primary question that is the concern of this paper is: what should be our theoretical reaction to the existence of what appear to be these semantically quite different uses of singular terms?

For various reasons, I propose to set aside the case of pronouns here. Thus, I propose to concentrate on the other cases mentioned: the cases of names, indexicals and complex demonstratives. I take it that one can easily imagine uses of names, indexicals and complex demonstratives on which the uses *seem* to refer to the individuals they designate, and hence contribute the individuals to the propositions expressed. Such uses are those that are most discussed in the semantics literature. For the sake of explicitness, let’s consider some paradigmatic examples of uses of this sort.

Names

(uttered by me talking about a good friend I have known for many years)

1. Glenn is a good architect.

Indexicals

(uttered when asked what I did today)

2. I went surfing.

Complex Demonstratives

(uttered pointing at a lone, very salient dog)

3. That dog is smart.

Let's call such uses *referring uses* to mark the fact that the uses in some sense *seem* to refer to the entities they designate, where the label here *does not* entail that the uses in question are *semantically* referring in the sense of contributing (only) the designated individuals to the propositions expressed in the contexts in question by the sentences in which they occur.

On the other hand, as I've suggested, each kind of singular term under discussion has uses in which the occurrences of the expressions do not seem to be semantically referring.³

Names

4. Dan Quayle is no Jack Kennedy.

5. Leningrad became St. Petersburg in 1991.

6. Many Kennedys have died tragically.

7. There are hundreds of O'Learys in Dublin.

Indexicals (including demonstratives like 'you')

8. Never put off to *tomorrow* what you can do *today*.

9. [Explaining why I waited to answer the door] You might have been an armed robber.

Complex Demonstratives

10. Everyone who survives a heart attack never forgets *that moment*.

Let's call these uses *non-referring uses*. In calling these uses non-referring, I mean to claim that the uses of the expressions don't contribute individuals to the propositions expressed in the contexts in question by the sentences in which they occur.⁴ I take it that in at least most of these cases it is pretty clear that the relevant uses of expressions don't contribute individuals to propositions and so don't semantically refer in these sentences. Thus, I hope it is pretty clear that standard semantic accounts of names, indexicals and complex demonstratives according to which they are semantically referring expressions, that is devices of direct reference, do not properly account for the above uses of these expressions.

In urging semanticists to take these non-referring uses of singular terms more seriously, Kent Bach [2005] claims that much of what passes for linguistic reference, that is, much of what passes for a linguistic expression *semantically* referring to something, is simply a matter of *speaker* reference—a matter of a *speaker* referring to something in using the expression—where the expression in question doesn't *semantically* refer at all. More cautiously, Bach's point is that in the case of the majority of alleged referring expressions (e.g. our singular terms), it isn't at all clear that the expressions *semantically* have referents as opposed to not *semantically* having referents at all, but being *used by speakers* to refer. That is, Bach claims that it is not at all clear that what we have called referring uses of singular terms *semantically* refer.

To appreciate Bach's point, it will help to discuss definite descriptions. For the sake of argument and for illustrative purposes, let's suppose that definite descriptions are univocally quantifiers, understood more or less along the lines of Russell [1905]. Nothing I am going to say hinges on this supposition, and I could just as well use as examples expressions that virtually everyone takes to be quantifiers, such as 'every professor'. But definite descriptions will better illustrate certain points. Now anyone who holds that definite descriptions are univocally quantifiers and who has read Donnellan [1966] agrees that in some sense speakers can use definite descriptions to refer to individuals. But of course, such a person will not hold that definite descriptions *semantically* are referring expressions. They are *semantically* quantificational, but that need not prevent speakers from using them to refer to individuals. This shows that the fact that *speakers* can use an expression to refer to an individual does not by itself show that the expression (or a use of it) *semantically* refers.

Now as we've seen, most so-called referring expressions have uses that don't refer; the non-referring uses of our singular terms are examples. And standard accounts of these expressions according to which they are *semantically* referring expressions cannot account for the uses in question. But then, Bach says, these non-referring uses call into question the claim that the expressions in question are *semantically* referring expressions. Why not think instead that the expressions in question have some other semantics according to which they are not *semantically* referring expressions, but that *speakers* can nonetheless use the expressions to refer to individuals? After all, as we have seen, this is precisely the case with definite descriptions (or so we are supposing).

In his more cautious moments, Bach puts his point here by saying things like "... it is far from clear that ... so-called referring expressions really refer..."⁵ In his less cautious moments, for example in formulating his argument ESA, Bach suggests that so-called referring expressions *do not* refer as a matter of their semantics.⁶ However, Bach is quick to add that he doesn't take ESA to be conclusive. Thus, I interpret Bach as issuing a challenge to semanticists who take so-called referring expressions, including our singular

terms, to be semantically referring expressions. The challenge is this. We know there are examples of expressions that semantically are not referring expressions but can be used by speakers to refer to things. Further, so-called referring expressions have non-referring uses. But then those who nonetheless take the expressions in question to be semantically referring expressions need to explain why *this* is the proper reaction to the existence of non-referring uses, as opposed for example to holding that so-called referring expressions do not refer as a matter of their semantics but can be used by speakers to refer.

Now broadly speaking, when confronted with non-referring uses of various so-called referring expressions, there are three different reactions one could have. First, one could hold that what is needed is a single semantics for the expression in question that captures both the referring and non-referring uses. Of course, the semantics need not hold that the expressions in question do in fact refer in the “referring” uses, but it should explain why they at least seem to. Let’s call this the *single semantics approach*, or *SA*. Second, one could hold that the expressions in question are ambiguous, with one semantic account explaining the “referring” uses and another semantic account explaining the non-referring uses. Let’s call this the *ambiguity approach*, or *AA*. Third, one could hold that one or the other kinds of uses are not to be completely explained by the semantics at all. So at least some of the uses of the expressions in question are given a different, at least partly non-semantic explanation. Let’s call this the *no semantic explanation approach*, or *NA*.

It might be wise to say a few words about NA and SA by way of clarification (I think AA is pretty clear). Oddly enough, it is easy to confuse SA and NA. The reason is that in both cases the expression being considered is provided with a single semantics. The difference is that SAs really *explain* all the various uses of the expression in wholly *semantic* terms. NAs, by contrast, hold that some features of some of the uses in question have no semantic explanation at all, and so the uses in question are given a partly non-semantic explanation. The example of definite descriptions we considered earlier, according to which they are semantically univocally quantifiers, provides an illustrative example of an NA. On such a view, referential uses are given a partly *pragmatic* explanation. Nothing in the semantics alone explains referential uses. Thus, this sort of view of definite descriptions is an NA. However, another kind of NA would be an account that claimed that some among the various uses of an expression being considered aren’t literal. Hence, there will be no wholly semantic explanation forthcoming for the uses in question. So, again, this is an instance of NA. Let’s consider a final sort of NA. Imagine a semantic theory of definite descriptions that had the following feature. It didn’t explain attributive uses *or* referential uses in completely semantic terms. In both cases, the uses in question are explained partly in semantic terms and partly in pragmatic terms. Then this is an NA, since some uses (indeed, all uses!) of definite descriptions are

explained partly in non-semantic terms. I consider this a sort of degenerate case of an NA. A final caveat before proceeding: I have been relying here on the vague notion of a *semantic explanation of certain uses of an expression*. I hope my illustrative remarks have given some content to this vague notion, and that my subsequent remarks on examples will do so.

As we have seen, Bach has raised the question as to why, in confronting non-referring uses of various alleged referring expressions, we don't say that the expressions in question are not semantically referring expressions at all, but that speakers nonetheless are able to refer in using them. As I have made clear, this would be to hold a view regarding the expressions in question that is like the view of definite descriptions we have been considering according to which they are not semantically referring expressions, but speakers refer in using them. Thus, Bach is raising the question as to why, when we are confronted with the non-referring uses of the expressions in question, we don't adopt an NA, explaining the referring uses partly in pragmatic terms (by invoking speaker reference). I will construe Bach as raising the more general methodological question as to how to decide in such a case whether to adopt an SA, AA or NA. After all, as I have said, adopting any of an SA, an NA or an AA is a possible reaction to the existence of non-referring uses of an alleged referring expression. I will construe Bach as asking which we should do and why. This is, in my view, a very good methodological question indeed.

In answering this question, of course we need to go case by case. So I'll consider the question for each sort of singular term we have been discussing. Thus, complex demonstratives, names and indexicals will be treated in turn. In each case I'll try to do two things. I'll tentatively suggest a semantic view that is either an SA, AA or NA. But more importantly, I'll try to illustrate *why* in a given case this is the route we should take. Though it is hard to say anything *completely* general about the conditions under which e.g. adopting an SA instead of an AA or NA is the correct thing to do, I hope that my discussion brings out how in practice we should make such decisions. As I hope my discussion makes clear, I am more concerned with illustrating how such decisions should be made, and hence with illustrating a methodology, than I am with being right about the fact that in a given case e.g. an SA is the way to go.

Let's begin with complex demonstratives. The example of a non-referring use discussed above (10) is similar to uses that I called *Quantification In Uses*, or *QI uses*, in King [2001]. To be clear on the sense in which I claim this use of a complex demonstrative doesn't semantically refer, again my point is simply that it doesn't contribute an individual time to the proposition expressed by 10 (on the reading where its truth allows different times for different survivors). If we held that it did, we wouldn't capture 10's intuitive truth conditions. Now in King [2001], I defend a single semantics for complex demonstratives that explains these uses as well as the more often discussed

uses. My semantics explains all the uses in the sense that it gives an account of what all uses of complex demonstratives contribute to the propositions expressed by the sentences in which they occur (relative to contexts); and in so doing I claim it assigns intuitively plausible propositions and truth conditions to those sentences. Thus, my account is an SA: a single semantics is given that purports to explain all the uses of complex demonstratives.

I am not going to try to defend my view of complex demonstratives here: for one thing, I want you to buy my book. But I do want to say something about why I opted for an SA as opposed to either an NA or an AA. The first point I wish to make is perhaps obvious but worth stating: in general, it isn't enough to defend an SA to formulate a semantics that explains all the uses in question and then claim that quite generally a single semantics that explains all uses is methodologically preferable to alternatives. To give a simple example, if the univocal semantics I formulate for 'bank' is that its meaning is a function from speaker's intentions to one of two properties, I don't think my opponents who endorse an AA for 'bank' should be too impressed. Similarly, because the different uses of complex demonstratives that my semantics applies to *appear* quite different, I didn't take the mere fact that I could formulate a single semantics that explains all uses by itself to be a decisive argument in favor of an SA. Indeed, I explicitly considered the objection to my semantics that it artificially cobbles together uses of expressions that don't really have anything in common semantically.⁷ The crucial point is that I defended an SA for complex demonstratives by providing independent evidence that there is a distinctive semantic feature *shared* by the various uses of complex demonstratives my semantics explains. I also pointed out that in all their uses, complex demonstratives exhibit exactly similar differences of behavior with definite descriptions. These two points, I claimed, provided independent evidence that we should pursue an SA for complex demonstratives. If that is right, they also provide evidence against an AA or NA for complex demonstratives.

I am not concerned presently with whether people find my *particular* claims in the case of complex demonstratives plausible. But I think the general point is important: when defending an SA for an expression that admits of somewhat diverse uses, some independent evidence should be given that the various uses share a semantics. Similarly, if one instead defends an AA, one should provide independent evidence that the expression under consideration is ambiguous. As Kripke [1977] noted in his discussion of Donnellan [1966], claims of ambiguity are cheap outs when counterexamples threaten a semantic theory. Thus, when not supported by independent evidence of ambiguity, they should be viewed with very considerable suspicion.

Let's now turn to names. As Bach [2005] suggests, 4 appears to be non-literal use of 'Jack Kennedy'. Even Tyler Burge, the arch advocate of the predicate view of names to be discussed below, thought this was a metaphorical use of a name. Thus, let me leave it aside. I also propose to

leave aside uses such as 5. They strike me as somewhat marked, and have a limited scope. On learning exactly when Oriana acquired her name, for example, it would be odd for me to report this by saying that she became Oriana on such and such a date at such and such a time. So let me focus on non-referring uses such as 6 and 7. Note that in dismissing 4 and 5 as non-literal or otherwise “funny”, I am already opting for an NA for names. For I am holding that uses like 4 and 5, being non-literal, will not be given a wholly semantic explanation. But for convenience let me here talk of whether we should adopt an SA or an AA for uses of names comprising examples such as 6 and 7 and more usual uses, such as 1 and

11. Seth Morrison is a skier.

Now I take it that it at least appears that ‘Kennedys’ and ‘O’Learys’ in 6 and 7 do not refer to particular individuals. That is, these uses of names do not contribute individuals to the propositions expressed by those sentences. After all, these sentences look a lot like

12. Many pigs have died tragically.

13. There are hundreds of pigs in Dublin.

and in these latter sentences we are not tempted to hold that ‘pigs’ is a referring expression. For the moment let’s suppose that we don’t try to explain away the uses in 6 and 7 as not literal or etc.; further let’s not worry about the fact that in its most natural use 6 expresses a claim about the members of the famous Kennedy family, whereas 7 expresses a claim about people named ‘O’Leary’ whether in the same family or not. Our question is: should we adopt an SA or an AA for uses of names comprising those in 6 and 7 together with the more typical referring uses? Without begging any semantic questions and for ease of reference, let’s call the former uses *predicative uses* and the latter, again, *referring uses*.

I think there are reasons favoring an AA here.⁸ First, the mere fact that predicative uses of names are in a different syntactic category than referring uses suggests that they should be assigned different semantics. In predicative uses names function as count nouns. On most accounts of constructions like 6 and 7 (e.g. 12 and 13), the count nouns in question express properties and in 7 the determiner expresses a relation between properties. By contrast, in sentences like 1, the expression in subject position is a noun phrase (or DP) and in some sense designates an individual. The difference in syntactic category is reflected in the different proforms one may use in the two cases:

14. Many Jeff Kings live in LA and Oriana knows one.

15. Jeff King lives in LA and Oriana knows him.

All this gives us *prima facie* reason to think that predicative uses should be assigned a semantics appropriate to count nouns, and that referring uses should be assigned a semantics on which they designate individuals.⁹ That is, the above points give us *prima facie* reason to think that the uses in question should be assigned different semantics, and so *prima facie* supports an AA for the uses of names in question.

Second, there seems to be an important difference in modal behavior between the two sorts of uses. Consider:

16. Doug Stanley lacks a name. That's false, but it might have been true.

17. Every Doug Stanley lacks a name. That's false, but it might have been true.

Intuitively, the second sentence of 16 is true, but not the second sentence of 17.¹⁰

Third, and I think crucially, the main attempts in the literature to defend SAs for the uses of names in question fail. I'll consider two such attempts: Burge [1973] and Bach [2002].¹¹ First, let's consider the view of Burge [1973]. Burge [1973] defends what he calls a "modified predicative view" of names according to which he claims we get a single semantics for predicative and referring uses of names. Details aside, on Burge's view, a proper name is a predicate that is true of an object iff the object was given the name in an appropriate way. This semantics straightforwardly explains predicative uses, but what of referring uses? Regarding such uses, Burge writes:

They [referring uses of proper names] play . . . the role of a demonstrative and a predicate. Roughly, singular unmodified proper names, functioning as singular terms, have the same semantical structure as the phrase 'that book'.¹²

Burge also repeatedly claims that (referring uses of) names "involve a demonstrative element". It is not clear exactly what Burge intends to be claiming here. However, it seems to me there are two ways to interpret him.

The first way to interpret Burge here is as claiming that referring uses of names consist of a predicate fronted by an implicit determiner, either 'this' or 'that'.¹³ As promised, this account gives a single semantics for predicative and referring uses of names: in all such uses names are predicates, and in referring uses these predicates are fronted by an implicit 'this' or 'that'. Note that the account addresses my concern that referring uses and predicative uses belong to different syntactic categories. On this proposal, they belong to the same syntactic category: all uses of names are count nouns!

To assess this claim, we need to consider whether there is independent evidence for or against it. It seems to me there is independent evidence against it. If in referring uses, names are count nouns fronted by an implicit determiner, then both of the following sentences ought to be fine:

18. That Glenn Bunting is happy but this one isn't.

19. *Glenn Bunting is happy but this one isn't.

After all, the only difference is that in the second sentence the determiner is covert. But the second sentence is not fine. Let me add that in other cases in which it is claimed that bare count nouns are fronted by implicit determiners, the analogous evidence *supports* that claim. Some think that in sentences containing bare plural count nouns such as

20. Dogs are kind.

there is an implicit generic determiner. Note that here the analogue of 19 is fine:

21. Dogs are kind, but this one isn't.

So the oddness of 19 above counts as independent evidence against the view of proper names under consideration.

There is a second piece of independent evidence against the view. The view claims that names are count nouns, and that a "bare" (singular) name in subject position can designate a particular individual in the extension of the name qua count noun. But then why can't other count nouns function in this way? That is, in the following sentence:

22. Dog is kind.

the count noun 'Dog' cannot be used to designate a particular dog. So here the advocate of the predicate view of names has to hold that names qua count nouns exhibit exceptional behavior not exhibited by other count nouns. This too is a strike against the view. Thus, there is significant independent evidence against Burge's view interpreted in this way.

But there is another way to interpret Burge's claim that referring uses of proper names "play the role" of a predicate and a demonstrative. Perhaps the claim is that such uses of names (in conjunction with what Burge calls "extrasentential action or context", by which he presumably means completion by a demonstration, speaker's intention or etc.) make contributions to propositions of the same sort made by complex demonstratives.¹⁴ Nothing is being claimed about the *syntax* of names. The claim is purely semantic: referring uses of names function semantically like complex demonstratives.

It is important to see that on this interpretation of Burge, his view isn't an SA! Names in predicative uses make contributions to propositions of the sort made by count nouns.¹⁵ Names in referring uses make contributions of the sort made by complex demonstratives. These contributions are of

different sorts and names in referring uses and names in predicative uses will be governed by different semantic clauses. So we simply don't have a *single* semantics for referring uses and predicative uses of names, any more than standard theorists give a single semantics for 'surfboard' and 'that surfboard'. Hence, this view isn't an SA at all.¹⁶

So the upshot is that there are two ways to interpret Burge's claims about names. On one interpretation, his view is an SA for names, but there is significant independent evidence against his view. On the other interpretation, Burge's view isn't an SA at all. So either Burge is proposing an SA for names that has strong independent evidence against it or he is proposing an AA for names. I conclude that Burge has given no reason for favoring an SA for referring and predicative uses of names over an AA for them.

A second attempt to defend an SA for names is Bach [2002]. Bach discusses predicative uses of names such as our 6 and 7.¹⁷ He notes that direct reference theories, which Bach calls *Millian* and *referentialist*, will not be able to account for such uses and will attempt to "dismiss predicative uses as marginal cases".¹⁸ He then writes:

Much preferable is a unified account of names, one that can handle their various uses.¹⁹

Bach makes clear that he takes his own theory, the *Nominal Description Theory*, or *NDT*, to be such a unified account.²⁰ That is, Bach takes it to be an SA for referring and predicative uses. What is NDT? NDT holds that a name 'N' occurring alone (i.e. as a whole noun phrase) in a sentence is "semantically equivalent" to the description "the bearer of 'N'". That is, in referring uses (among others) occurrences of 'N' are "semantically equivalent" to "the bearer of 'N'". It should be evident immediately that this can't be the proper account for predicative uses, on pain of making 6 "semantically equivalent" to "Many the bearer of 'Kennedys' have died tragically". So Bach holds that in predicative uses, a name 'N' expresses the property of bearing 'N'.

On Bach's view, then, in predicative uses names express properties just as other count nouns do and in referring uses they are equivalent to definite descriptions. But now it should be plain that Bach's view isn't an SA at all, that is, it isn't a "unified account of names" that handles both referring and predicative uses. Referring and predicative uses will make different sorts of contributions to propositions and Bach will need distinct semantic clauses for referring uses and predicative uses. Thus Bach no more gives a single semantics for names than do standard theorists give a single semantic account for 'surfboard' and 'the surfboard'.²¹ So contrary to what Bach [2002] seems to claim, no SA is on offer. I conclude that Bach [2002] offers no reason for favoring an SA for names over an AA.^{22,23}

To summarize, I have claimed that there is *prima facie* reason to think that predicative uses of names have a different semantics from referring uses

and hence that we ought to pursue an AA for these uses of names. I then argued that the main attempts in the literature to defend SAs for names fail. Surely, this gives us reason to think that we should pursue an AA for the uses of names in question.²⁴

Finally, let's turn to indexicals. Here again it seems clear that in the uses in 8 and 9, which are inspired by pioneering work on this topic by Geoff Nunberg [1993], the expressions in question do not semantically refer. 8's intuitive truth conditions are not given by a proposition that contains as constituents the day of utterance and the day following that. Similarly, 9's intuitive truth conditions are not that the referent of 'you' might have been an armed robber. Let's call the alleged readings given by the intuitive truth conditions of these sentences *the descriptive readings*.

For the sake of thoroughness, let me also list some other examples from Nunberg that have descriptive readings:

23. [uttered by a condemned prisoner] I am traditionally allowed to order whatever I like for my last meal.

24. [uttered by the President] The Founders invested me with sole responsibility for appointing Supreme Court justices.

25. [uttered on December 31, 2003] Today is always the biggest party day of the year.

Now the first point I want to make is that again the meanings of the indexicals (including 'you') in these sentences don't seem the same as the meanings of indexicals in referring uses, at least in any intuitive sense of 'meaning'.²⁵ That intuitively the expressions have different meanings is illustrated by the oddity of the following sentences:

26. You might not have shown up today and might have been an armed robber.

27. Today is September 29, 2004 and is always the time to do what you can instead of putting it off until tomorrow.

26 is odd if we read 'you' in the first conjunct as referring (so that I say of the referent of 'you' that she might not have shown up) and try to give the second conjunct a descriptive reading (as saying that the person at the door might have been an armed robber). The explanation is that in reading the conjuncts in these two ways 'you' has to mean different things, and so the attempt to read the single occurrence of 'you' in both ways results in oddity. (Compare: 'The bank was sandy and robbed by masked men.') But then this suggests that the referring and non-referring uses of 'you' mean different things in some sense. Similar remarks apply to 27, which is even more obviously odd.

Given that these sentences seem to show that in some sense, the uses of indexicals mean different things in our examples, this still leaves open how to proceed. Should we: 1) pursue an SA by assigning indexicals some higher level meaning and claim that the apparent difference in meaning in the uses considered is a result of that one higher level meaning determining different meanings for the uses in question relative to context (or etc.); or 2) pursue an AA by simply assigning referring uses and non-referring uses different semantics; or 3) pursue an NA by claiming that the non-referring uses aren't to be given a wholly semantic explanation at all?

If I understand his view correctly, Nunberg [2004] himself opts for 1.²⁶ Roughly, Nunberg's view is that conversational purposes determine a domain of discourse, which contains the entities that can be quantified over and referred to in the conversation. He notes that in a typical use of a sentence like 'The day of the final Giants game was cloudy' the domain over which 'the final Giants game' quantifies is restricted to Giants games in a particular year (and not all Giants games ever played). Though there is some debate about exactly what the mechanism is by means of which such restrictions occur, this much seems uncontroversial. Nunberg then makes a much more controversial claim. He claims that in a given context, not only can conversational purposes restrict which individuals we quantify over, but they can also determine which properties of individuals in the contextually determined domain are "relevant" and even what counts as an individual. Nunberg writes:

... there can only be as many individuals in the domain as are individuated by the conversationally relevant properties.²⁷

And a bit later, he says:

In this regard, the context is no different from other domains: we recognize only as many distinct contextual elements as are individuated by conversationally relevant properties.²⁸

Nunberg thinks this alleged fixing of what count as distinct individuals by conversational purposes explains how the referent of 'here' can be a larger or smaller area. When 'here' refers to, for example, a neighborhood (as can be imagined for a use of a sentence like 'John grew up here.') this is because conversational purposes dictate that two locations are distinct only when growing up in one would be growing up in a different place than growing up in the other. So for the purposes of the conversation, there are only as many places as there are neighborhoods, and so 'here', which refers to a place, must refer to a neighborhood. When 'here' refers to a "smaller" location, that is because conversational purposes dictate that locations smaller than neighborhoods may count as distinct places.

Before turning to how all of this is supposed to explain the descriptive readings of our sentences 8,9 and 23–25, let me make a couple of comments

on this way of explaining how the size of the location 'here' refers to can vary with context. First, the account seems a bit tortured. Why not simply say that conversational purposes, speaker intentions or whatever *directly* determine the extent of the space that 'here' refers to? Why the detour through conversational purposes determining when locations count as distinct? It is hard to see what is gained by such a strategy.

Further, and worse, Nunberg's strategy just doesn't seem to work. Consider the following:

28. John grew up here and so would have known that there are many places here to hide a dead body.

Surely we could sketch a context in which two police officers are discussing a crime and one utters 28, where it is clear that 'here' refers to the town they are in. But it is equally clear that smaller-than-town-sized places count as distinct places in this conversation. If that were not so, the phrase 'many places here' in the second conjunct would sound oxymoronic! So in this case, the extent of 'here' is a location larger than those that count as distinct places given the purposes of the conversation. This contradicts Nunberg's account.

In any case, let us see how Nunberg's view is supposed to account for descriptive readings of 8,9 and 23–25. Here is what Nunberg says about how the alleged ability of conversational purposes to determine which individuals count as distinct explains the descriptive reading of 25:

Take *Today is always the biggest party day of the year*. *Today* picks out the day of utterance, just as it always does. But in the relevant discourse model, there are only as many distinct days as are individuated by the properties relevant to the conversational purposes. . . . That is, there is no way to individuate the day of utterance from others having the same relevant properties. . . . the linguistic meaning [character level meaning of 'today'] "the (calendar) day on which the utterance takes place" is satisfied by the only day in the domain of discourse that corresponds to the time of utterance—but relative to the conversational purposes, that day simply doesn't have the properties that differentiate the actual day of utterance from others that fall on the same date.²⁹

So in the case of 25, conversational purposes don't individuate different December 31s and so the domain of discourse only contains one "day" December 31. Since there is only one December 31 in the domain of discourse and it is not any particular December 31, 'today' as uttered on December 31, 2003 refers in virtue of its *literal meaning* to the one big December 31. Similar remarks apply to the other examples: in the case of 23, conversational purposes determine a domain of quantification that doesn't distinguish between condemned prisoners, and so contains one, big condemned prisoner. The use of 'I' then in virtue of its *literal meaning* refers to this "thing". So 'I'

and ‘today’ have the same semantics here as they do in more usual uses. Thus the account is an SA. I should add that so far Nunberg’s account doesn’t yet explain the descriptive readings of 23 and 25. Though Nunberg doesn’t say it, I think he thinks that if ‘Today’ refers to the one big December 31 in 25, then the sentence has truth conditions that require *all* December 31s to be the biggest party days of the years they occur in. Similar remarks apply to 23.

It seems to me that there are some problems with Nunberg’s account. First, it has a metaphysical price. Conversational purposes can’t bring these big condemned prisoners and December 31s into being. Given what exists already, perhaps conversational purposes can in some way cut down on what we quantify over and refer to. In my view, however, conversational purposes can’t *create* things to quantify over and refer to.³⁰ But then Nunberg needs to independently posit rather odd individuals, like big, undifferentiated condemned prisoners and December 31s. If there are good, independent metaphysical reasons for thinking there are such things, then fine. But positing such things just because they are needed in one’s semantics is putting things the wrong way around: needs in semantics just shouldn’t drive metaphysics in this way. On the other hand, perhaps Nunberg should be construed as offering some sort of pretense theoretic account: given certain conversational purposes we *pretend* there is only one Dec 31 or condemned prisoner.³¹ I won’t go into it here, but I find pretense theoretic semantic accounts generally suspect for reasons like those outlined by Jason Stanley [2001].

A bigger worry is that Nunberg’s view overgenerates. If you look at the sentences we have considered, there is always some element in the sentence that triggers the descriptive reading: ‘never’, ‘always’, ‘traditionally’ and so on. But on Nunberg’s account it is not at all clear why that should be. As we saw, he compares what goes on in these cases with the way in which conversational purposes may determine whether a use of ‘here’ refers to a house, a neighborhood, or a country. In the case of ‘here’, in garden variety sentences like

29. John lives here.

the referent of ‘here’ can be a house, a neighborhood or a country. But then on Nunberg’s account, given the appropriate conversational purposes, a garden variety sentence like:

30. [uttered December 31, 2003] It is cloudy today.

should have a descriptive reading on which it means that all December 31s are cloudy (or the one, big December 31 is cloudy). I submit that the sentence does not allow such a reading.

Finally, and related to this last point, we saw above that contrary to Nunberg's account, conversational purposes can allow distinct places of a certain size, where 'here' has as its referent a place of a larger size. He has similar problems with the account of the descriptive reading of 25. Imagine a rather eclectic and bohemian elementary school science teacher saying the following on December 31, 2003:

31. Time goes back billions and billions of years. Each of these years has 365 days, and is divided up into 12 months. Most of the months, including December, have 31 days; others have 30 or fewer. The days of the month are numbered beginning with 1 and ending with 28, 30 or 31. So each year has a January 1, 2, etc., February 1, 2, etc., etc. Don't worry; we'll cover the details later. Obviously, then there have been many, many days. And lots of days are good for parties! But most importantly, today is always the biggest party day of the year.

Despite the somewhat offbeat nature of the discourse, we clearly still get the descriptive reading of the final sentence here. But it just cannot be that conversational purposes don't distinguish between different December 31s. The prior part of the discourse entails that there are distinct December 31s! Thus Nunberg's account of the descriptive reading simply doesn't work here.

For all these reasons, Nunberg's attempt at an SA for referring and non-referring uses of indexicals fails. Given this and because I can think of no other plausible single semantics for such uses, I tend to think that an SA here is hopeless. As for pursuing an AA and assigning a separate semantics to indexicals to capture their descriptive readings, this has at least two problems. First, it has one of the same problems as Nunberg's proposal: if indexicals really are ambiguous, the descriptive readings should be present in virtually any sentence whose meaning doesn't prevent it from arising. But again sentences such as 30 don't have descriptive readings. Second, given that a sentence such as

9. You might have been an armed robber.

can have an incredible variety of descriptive readings given different conversational purposes and situations of the addressee (standing at my door, standing behind me at an ATM, etc.), it just isn't clear what sort of semantics would capture descriptive readings.

These facts incline me to think that we should pragmatically explain descriptive readings, and so adopt an NA for indexicals. A further fact inclining me to this conclusion is that the descriptive readings are so fragile and idiosyncratic. For example, consider the following:

25. (uttered on December 31, 2003) Today is always the biggest party day of the year.

32. (uttered by a condemned prisoner) *I am always allowed to order whatever I like for my last meal.

32 does not allow the descriptive reading but 25 does. Something about the interaction of ‘always’ and ‘today’ gives rise to the reading in 25, but ‘I’ and ‘always’ don’t so interact as to give rise to the reading in 32. Further, even the combination of ‘today’ and ‘always’ don’t always give rise to the descriptive reading. If on some random day, I say:³²

33.? I always have a cold today.

the descriptive reading, on which the sentence asserts that the calendar day of my utterance is a day on which I have a cold every year, seems at the very least quite strained and probably simply not present. This sort of fragility and idiosyncrasy suggest to me a non-semantic, and so pragmatic, explanation for the descriptive readings and hence an NA for referring and non-referring uses of indexicals.

Let me close by noting two facts that such a pragmatic account needs to explain. First, it should explain the fact already noted that descriptive “readings” seem to require some sort of trigger in the sentence in question. As I’ve suggested, something in the interaction of these triggers with indexicals and demonstratives seems to generate the readings. Second, the account needs to explain, as Nunberg [1993] already noted, why the “readings” don’t seem to arise, or at the very least don’t seem to arise as readily, with names (or name like expressions) instead of indexicals:

34. Alan is traditionally allowed to order whatever he likes for his last meal.

35. March 26, 2004 is always the biggest party night of the year.

This second point strongly suggests that it is the character level meaning of indexicals and demonstratives that somehow interacts with the triggers to produce the descriptive readings.³³ Since names lack such meanings, the descriptive readings can’t be generated in 34 and 35.

In conclusion, I have claimed that each of the cases we have discussed is to be treated differently. For complex demonstratives, I recommend an SA; for names an AA and for indexicals an NA.³⁴ If I am right, then names and indexicals really do *semantically* refer in their referring uses.³⁵ More importantly, I have claimed that attention to the particulars of each case and the marshalling of *independent* evidence are crucial to deciding whether to pursue and SA, an AA or an NA. Most importantly, in discussing our three cases, I have tried to illustrate the methodology by means of which such decisions ought to be made.

Notes

1. This paper began life as a commentary on a version of Kent Bach [2005] delivered at the Pacific Division Meetings of the American Philosophical Association in Pasadena, California in spring 2004. Thanks to Kent for raising the very interesting methodological questions that the paper is devoted to addressing. Thanks also to Kent again, Jason Stanley and George Wilson for encouraging me to write a stand alone version of the paper for publication.
2. I use ‘designate’ here more or less as I used it in King [2002]: as a neutral term so that two uses of different expressions used to “talk about” individuals may be said to designate those individuals even if the uses ultimately function differently semantically. E.g. if definite descriptions are really quantificational, as Russell [1905] argued, and indexicals are devices of direct reference, as Kaplan [1977] argued, then despite this difference in their semantics, uses of both may still designate individuals. I talk here of uses of such expressions being *conventionally* used to designate individuals to distinguish them from certain uses of expressions like ‘every philosopher in this room’. Though uses of the latter may be used to “talk about” an individual in some sense (as when I say ‘Every philosopher in this room is angry’, where I and my audience know there is only one philosopher in the room), I assume expressions like this are not *conventionally* used to “talk about” or designate individuals.
3. Examples like 4,6 and 7 are sometimes mentioned in the literature. Burge [1973] is perhaps most responsible for attempting to focus theoretical attention on such uses, though even Burge held that uses like that of ‘Jack Kennedy’ in 4 are metaphorical. Kent Bach [2002] brought examples like 5 to my attention. Kaplan [1977] mentions 8 (note 34) and attributes it to Richmond Thomason. I thought examples like 9 were due to Nunberg [1993] or [2004] but I couldn’t find them there. I am not sure who introduced them into the literature. Later we shall consider related examples involving indexicals and demonstratives due to Nunberg. Examples like 10 are discussed in King [1999] and [2001].
4. Thus, on my use of the terms, non-referring uses don’t semantically refer (contribute only individuals designated to propositions) and referring uses may or may not semantically refer.
5. P. 38, my emphasis.
6. Bach [2005] p. 28.
7. See King [2001] Chapter 5.
8. This is contrary to Bach’s [2005] claim L2 (p. 27) and to the second premise of his argument ESA (p. 28).
9. Recall that ‘designate’ is a neutral term. See note 2.
10. One can hear the second sentence of 17 as making a “de re claim” about people in fact named ‘Doug Stanley’. Heard this way, the second sentence can seem true. I am considering the “reading” on which the second sentence of 17 is taken as making a “de dicto claim.”
11. I realize there are other attempts to defend SAs, but these are the two best known. I believe the arguments I give against these, or very similar arguments, work against other proposals as well.
12. P. 599

13. Some of Burge's remarks appear to support this interpretation of him. First, he gives a syntax for names in his (largely implicit) formal language ((i) p. 600), and the syntactic representation contains a free variable that he says "represents the demonstrative governing the whole scope of the term" (p. 600—in the last line of the paper Burge repeats the claim that his free variables represent demonstratives.) He comments that he prefers this representation to another he considers ((ii) p. 600) because it "seems to me to represent better the syntax of English" (p. 600). If the variable in his favored syntactic representation represents a demonstrative (by which he seems to mean 'this' or 'that'—he calls 'this' a demonstrative on p. 599), and he prefers this representation to others because it better represents English syntax, this certainly sounds like he is claiming that there is a demonstrative ('this' or 'that') in the English syntactic representation of a name (in a referring use). Obviously, if there is, it is implicit. So these remarks suggest that he is claiming that in referring uses, names are predicates fronted by an implicit occurrence of 'this' or 'that'. Second, Burge says that there is a demonstrative element in the *sentence* 'Jim is tall' (pp. 599–600). This at least suggests that he thinks that there is an implicit demonstrative ('this' or 'that') in the *sentence*.
14. I talk here in terms of propositions for convenience and ease of exposition. Burge is working in a Tarskian truth theoretic framework, and so we should put things in terms of names and complex demonstratives making similar contributions to truth conditions or in terms of the semantic clauses for names (see p. 600) being like the semantic clauses for complex demonstratives. But none of the points I make depends on employing the framework of propositions, and it makes exposition easier to do so.
15. Alternatively, the semantic clauses for such uses of names will be exactly like the clauses for other count nouns.
16. I suppose the advocate of this view could try to argue that his view is a superior AA for names because the semantics of names in referring uses is "closer" or "more related" to the semantics of names in predicative uses on his view than on a view according to which names are simple (non-demonstrative) referring expressions on referring uses and are count nouns on predicative uses. But, first, it isn't clear that this is true. Surely, even on the latter view the semantics of names on referring uses is very much related to the semantics of predicative uses of names (something is in the extension of a predicative use just in case it is the referent of a referring use). Thus, it isn't at all clear to me that the meanings of referring uses of names are closer to the meanings of predicative uses on the former view. Second, it is not at all clear to me that the alleged fact that the meanings of the two uses of names are closer on the view under discussion is any real advantage. Both views claim that different semantic clauses have to be given for the two uses of names. Why should the fact (if it is one) that the meanings are closer on one view confer any advantage on that view? Both views require two semantic clauses. In any case, though this question of *which* AA to adopt for names is an interesting one, we here are concerned with whether to adopt an SA or an AA for names. And thus the crucial point for us is the one just made in the body of the paper: on this interpretation of Burge, his view isn't an SA at all, but rather an AA.
17. See p. 5 examples 5–7. Bach also considers other "non-referential uses" but these aren't relevant to the criticisms I will make of Bach's view.

18. P. 5. See also p. 2 and note 6. He seems to ignore the fact that Millians could hold predicative uses to be literal and treat them as count nouns on such uses.
19. P. 5
20. See also the last two paragraphs of Bach's paper, p. 22.
21. This is, of course, precisely analogous to the criticism I made of one interpretation of Burge's view.
22. As with one interpretation of Burge, Bach could claim that on the AA he is defending for names, the meanings of referring uses and predicative uses are "closer" than on other AAs. I would respond to this in the way I did to a similar claim on behalf of one interpretation of Burge. See my note 16. Again, the important point for us isn't which AA is preferable, but rather whether there is some reason for thinking we should give an SA for names. I claim Bach provides no reason for thinking this.
23. There are two other arguments against Bach's view that are independent of Bach's claiming it to be an SA. First, on Bach's view, 'Aristotle bears a name' should express a necessary truth (or at any rate, something that is true in any world in which someone bears the name 'Aristotle'), since it should be semantically equivalent to "The bearer of 'Aristotle' bears a name." But it certainly doesn't seem to at all. Bach would respond that the reason it doesn't seem to is that in using names we are generally trying to convey singular propositions and not the propositions semantically encoded by the sentences containing the names (which of course aren't singular propositions containing the bearer of the name on his view). Thus, we tend to take 'Aristotle bears a name' as conveying a singular proposition containing Aristotle, and so one that is contingent. That is all well and good, but it is strange that we *can't* (not that it is *hard*, but that we *can't*) hear the sentence as expressing the proposition it semantically encodes! I have trouble with a semantic theory that assigns sentences propositions that they *can't* be heard as conveying. A second problem with Bach's view is that he takes the 'is' in a sentence like

(i) Eminem is Marshall Mathers

to express identity, whereas he claims 'is' in

(ii) Eminem is not Snoop Doody

expresses predication (see p. 5 examples 3 and 4 and surrounding comments—Bach is supposing that there is no Snoop Doody; I have varied Bach's 4 (my (ii)) but not in any way that matters). But consider

(iii) Eminem is Marshall Mathers, and not Snoop Doody.

Here 'is' is elided in the second conjunct and so the second conjunct contains a null verb with the semantic properties of its antecedent (the occurrence of 'is' in the first conjunct) Thus, the null verb in the second conjunct picks up its semantic properties from the 'is' in the first conjunct, and so must be read in the same way. But then if the 'is' in the first conjunct expresses identity as Bach claims, so must the null verb in the second conjunct. Surely this casts serious doubt on the claim that the 'is' in (ii) doesn't express identity. For (ii) and the second conjunct of (iii) certainly seem to express the same claim.

24. Recall that I set aside the question of whether we should attempt to explain away predicative uses of names.
25. Again, this is contrary to Bach's L2 and the second premise of his ESA. See my note 8.
26. I focus on the view in Nunberg [2004] because it refines the view defended in Nunberg [1993]. See Nunberg [2004] pps. 12–13.
27. P. 15
28. P. 16
29. P. 17.
30. Or at least not thing like big condemned prisoners and December 31s.
31. Some of Nunberg's remarks suggest he should be read in this way, particularly his talk of conversational purposes fixing what *counts* as an individual.
32. By 'random day', I mean that the day is not my birthday, or the Fourth of July or etc. It's just another day.
33. It may be that expressions that require demonstrations to have referents in contexts (unlike 'today' and 'I') don't have character level meaning except in a context (i.e. that their conventional meanings are something like functions from demonstrations to characters).
34. Recall that strictly speaking I endorsed an NA for names as well as an AA, since I held that uses like those in 4 and 5 are "funny" or non-literal and hence have no wholly semantic explanation. So I endorse an NA for names generally and an AA for referring and predicative uses of names.
35. Again, contrary to L2 and the second premise of ESA in Bach [2005].

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