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‘SHE’ AND ‘HE’: POLITICALLY CORRECT PRONOUNS

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ABSTRACT. It is argued that the pronouns ‘she’ and ‘he’ are disguised complex demonstratives of the form ‘that female/male’. Three theories of complex demonstratives are examined and shown to be committed to the view that ‘s/he’ turns out to be an empty term when used to refer to a hermaphrodite. A fourth theory of complex demonstratives, one that is hermaphrodite friendly, is proposed. It maintains that complex demonstratives such as ‘that female/male’ and the pronoun ‘s/he’ can succeed in referring to someone independently of his or her gender. This theory incorporates: (i) a multiple proposition view, i.e., the view that an utterance of a sentence containing a complex demonstrative expresses two (or more) propositions, namely the background proposition(s) and the official one; (ii) that the referent of a complex demonstrative is a component of the official proposition expressed whether it satisfies the nominal part of the demonstrative expression or not; (iii) that the nominal part of a complex demonstrative only affect the background proposition(s) and (iv) that the utterance inherits its truth-value only from the official proposition.

1. THE DATUM

Suppose that, during a fashion show and in awe of the models on the catwalk, Jon utters:

- (1) That woman is gorgeous
- (2) That man is gorgeous
- (3) She is gorgeous
- (4) He is gorgeous

Unbeknownst to Jon, however, the model to whom Jon’s attention is directed with each utterance is, in each case, the very same individual, Aphrodite, for Aphrodite is a true hermaphrodite.¹ Aphrodite is indeed gorgeous, but does Jon say something true, something false, or neither with each utterance?

My intuitive view of the situation described above is that, with each utterance, Jon says something true. If this is the case, utterances



(1)–(4) must succeed in referring to Aphrodite and also in attributing to him/her the property of being gorgeous. I take this to be the datum that a theory of complex demonstratives like ‘that *F*’ and of pronouns like ‘s/he’ should try to capture. The desideratum can thus be rephrased as follows: our theory of complex demonstratives (and *a fortiori* of personal pronouns) should not exclude hermaphrodites as possible referents. It should be hermaphrodite friendly.

Before giving a theory that satisfies our desideratum, I first describe three prominent theories on the market. I show how these theories commit themselves to the thesis that utterances like (1)–(4) always say something false in the hermaphrodite case for, according to these views, hermaphrodites cannot be the referents of the third person pronouns ‘he’ or ‘she’ or of the complex demonstrative ‘that woman/man’. These theories are thus hermaphrodite *unfriendly*.

I then propose a theory of complex demonstratives and pronouns that I label *the naïve theory*. This theory fits our datum and captures our intuitions regarding the scenario, i.e., it predicts that each of Jon’s utterances is true. The naïve theory is thus hermaphrodite friendly.

Before going further, however, it is worth noting that the personal pronouns ‘he’ and ‘she’ have a built-in or hidden sortal component, for ‘she’, unlike ‘he’, is used to refer to a *female*. My *New Shorter Oxford* dictionary, under the entry for ‘s/he’, states: “The, or any, female/male person *who* (or *that*); the female/male person *of*, *with*”. Following this suggestion, we can assume that when a third person singular pronoun is used as a demonstrative, it can be understood along the same lines as ‘that female/male’ or ‘that woman/man’.² (1) can thus be viewed as synonymous with (3) and (2) as synonymous with (4).

One could challenge my claim and argue that hermaphrodites are *both* male and female and that (1)–(4) are true because Aphrodite satisfies both the predicate of being a male and of being a female.³ A hermaphrodite is, after all, an organism with both testicular and ovarian tissue. Since Aphrodite’s DNA contains both XX and XY chromosome pairs, s/he may qualify as being both male and female. Be that as it may, it does not seem to account for our practice of using the gender distinction when dealing with biological organisms. In our everyday linguistic practice we clearly distinguish

between males, females and hermaphrodites. A biological organism is classed as either male or female or as a hermaphrodite. We would not say, for instance, that a snail is both male and female. We say that it is neither, for it is a hermaphrodite. My objector could argue that we may wish to distinguish between linguistic gender and biological gender. After all, in many languages (such as Italian, Spanish, French and German, to name but a few) inanimate objects are assigned a gender for linguistic purposes, yet have no biological gender. Aphrodite (and hermaphrodites in general) could thus be said to have both the male and female linguistic gender even if, from a biological viewpoint, a hermaphrodite is neither male nor female.⁴ The divide between biological and linguistic gender raises the possibility that the pronoun 's/he' and the complex demonstrative 'that female/male' do differ in meaning. From a logical point of view, it is possible that 's/he' can only refer to an object if it possesses the appropriate *linguistic* gender, regardless of its biological gender, while 'that female/male' can only refer to an organism of the appropriate *biological* gender. If this were so, 's/he' and 'that female/male' would differ in meaning and (1) and (2) would be false whilst (3) and (4) would be true. However, my intuitive view is that it sounds implausible, for it does not capture our everyday use of the third person pronoun. I find it difficult to accept the idea that 's/he' can refer to hermaphrodites whilst 'that female/male' cannot, for it simply does not reflect our linguistic practice. Henceforth, I shall assume that the theory to be defended *should* treat 's/he' and 'that female/male' on a par and I take it to be *non-negotiable* that 's/he' is analogous with 'that female/male (person)'. If, however, you do not agree, then I invite you to assume it for the sake of argument.

2. COMPLEX DEMONSTRATIVES *QUA* DEFINITE DESCRIPTIONS

The first theory of complex demonstratives that I would like to consider can be labeled the descriptive theory. According to this theory, 'that' in 'that *F*' can be considered as a determiner, along with 'most', 'some', 'all', 'the', 'no' etc.⁵ Lepore and Ludwig (2000) propose one of the most detailed and appealing theories of complex demonstratives *qua* descriptions (for a recent and detailed quantificational account of complex demonstratives see King (2001)

as well). Lepore and Ludwig (2000) argue that ‘that *F*’ should be analyzed as:

(5) the *x*: *x* is that & *x* is *F*

where the description must be understood according to the Russellian theory. An expression such as ‘that *F*’, therefore, is a quantified term, not a singular term. A sentence like “that *F* is *G*” will be analyzed as:

(6) (the *x*: *x* is that & *x* is *F*) is *G*

If, on the suggestion of my dictionary, I am right in assuming that ‘s/he’ should be analyzed similarly to ‘that female/male’, then the descriptive theory is committed to the thesis that a sentence like “S/he is *G*” must also be analyzed as:

(7) (the *x*: *x* is that & *x* is *female/male*) is *G*

It should be stressed, however, that while Lepore and Ludwig treat complex demonstratives as disguised definite descriptions, they do not treat simple demonstratives (‘this’, ‘that’, etc.) and pronouns (‘s/he’, ‘we’, etc.) as disguised descriptions. While the former are semantically complex, the latter are semantically simple; the latter, unlike the former, are singular terms, or so they claim. Hence, Lepore and Ludwig must reject the analogy I propose between ‘s/he’ and ‘that female/male’. King (2001), on the other hand, suggests that simple demonstratives and complex demonstratives should be treated on a par: they are *all* quantified expressions. Insofar as King’s conception does not distinguish between simple and complex demonstratives, I believe that it is more appealing. It is the more economical option, i.e., it obeys the principle: do not introduce distinctions beyond necessity. In addition, King’s theory does not implicitly reject the analogy between ‘s/he’ and ‘that female/male’ and therefore captures our linguistic practices more accurately.

For the sake of argument, let us imagine a theory similar to Lepore and Ludwig’s that treats simple demonstratives and pronouns on a par, i.e. one that accepts the analogy between ‘s/he’ and ‘that female/male’. This theory accepts (7) as an accurate representation of “S/he is *G*”. On this analysis, utterances such as (1)–(4) turn out to be false, for Aphrodite is neither male nor female. The descriptive theory of complex demonstratives and pronouns is thus hermaphrodite *unfriendly*.

3. THE CHARACTER APPROACH TO COMPLEX DEMONSTRATIVES

The second theory of complex demonstratives I would like to consider was proposed in Braun (1994) and Borg (2000). According to this position, a complex demonstrative is a singular term. If the alleged referent does not satisfy the nominal part of a complex demonstrative, however, the latter is an empty term. In order for an utterance of "That *F* is *G*" to be true, the referent must be *F*. If the nominal '*F*' does not apply to the alleged referent, the utterance would be either truth-valueless or false (depending on the theory of empty terms one adopts).⁶

This position elaborates Kaplan's (1977) traditional framework for the logic of indexicals and demonstratives. It focuses on Kaplan's content/character distinction in placing the nominal '*F*' at the level of character, which we can understand as a rule enabling us to single out a referent. Such a rule can be captured in descriptive terms, i.e., as a description that gives us constraints that a referent must satisfy. The character of 'I', for instance, can be represented as a rule stating that a use of 'I' refers to the agent of the context. For a given context *c*, the semantic value of 'I' in *c* is an individual *i* iff *i* is the agent in *c*. In the same vein, it is argued that the nominal '*F*' plays a role in determining the character of 'that *F*'.

Since this theory appeals to structured characters, it allows for rather fine-grained distinctions in character between different expressions. Braun and Borg could thus argue that the character of 'that female/male' is more structured than the character of 's/he' and, therefore, that they differ in meaning. If this is the case, the character approach to complex demonstratives rejects the analogy I propose between 's/he' and 'that female/male' and the considerations against Lepore and Ludwig's theory apply here as well. A theory that does not implicitly reject the analogy between 's/he' and 'that female/male' should be preferred insofar as it captures our linguistic practices more accurately. For this reason, I assume that the character approach *does* treat 's/he' and 'that female/male' on a par. It is built into the meaning of the third person pronoun 's/he' that it refers to a male/female and therefore 'that *F*' is represented at the level of character by a rule of the following kind:

- (8) an individual i is the semantic value of ‘that F ’ with respect to a context c iff i is the demonstrated item in c and i satisfies the content of F in c .⁷

Following this suggestion, the pronoun ‘s/he’ can be analyzed using the following rule:

- (9) an individual i is the semantic value of ‘s/he’ with respect to a context c iff i is the demonstrated item in c and i is female/male in c .⁸

According to these rules, (1)–(4) are all false (or truth-valueless). Hence, this theory is hermaphrodite *unfriendly* as well.

4. COMPLEX DEMONSTRATIVES *QUA* ARTICULATED TERMS

The third theory of complex demonstratives I would like to discuss also assumes that complex demonstratives are singular terms. They are, however, articulated terms (see Richard, 1993). Unlike the theory discussed in the previous section, this theory does not commit itself to the thesis that ‘that F ’ is an empty term whenever the nominal ‘ F ’ does not apply to the alleged referent. Although ‘that F ’ may succeed in fixing a reference, the referent must be F for ‘That F is G ’ to be true. If the referent is not F , ‘That F is G ’ is false. Following this suggestion, a sentence like ‘That F is G ’ is analyzed as:

- (10) That₁ is F and it₁ is G

where the subscripts are the usual devices signaling co-referentiality. The nominal ‘ F ’ and the predicate ‘ G ’ are thus treated at the same level. In terms of propositions, a sentence like (1) expresses the single, conjoint proposition *that Aphrodite is a woman and Aphrodite is gorgeous*.

Like the previous theories I have discussed, this theory maintains that ‘s/he’ and ‘that female/male’ cannot be treated on a par, for the latter (unlike the former) is an articulated term. Thus the proposition expressed in uttering ‘that female/male’ (a semantically complex term) could never be the same as the one expressed in uttering ‘s/he’ (a semantically simple term). The former is an articulated

proposition, having among its constituents the property of being female/male, while the latter is a singular proposition without this property as a constituent. Again, if the articulated terms strategy rejects the analogy between 's/he' and 'that female/male', it does not capture our linguistic practice. For this reason, I assume that the articulated terms position treats 's/he' and 'that female/male' on a par, i.e., it assumes that the pronoun 's/he' is, contrary to appearances, articulated. It is, after all, built into the meaning of the third person pronoun that it is gender sensitive; why shouldn't the articulated terms strategy capture this? Following this suggestion, a sentence like "S/he is *G*" is analyzed as:

(11) That₁ is a female/male and it₁ is *G*

According to this proposal, a sentence like (3) expresses the false proposition *that Aphrodite is male and Aphrodite is gorgeous*. Since this theory holds that (1)–(4) are false in our scenario it is, like the two theories previously discussed, hermaphrodite *unfriendly*.

5. THE NAÏVE, POLITICALLY CORRECT, THEORY

I now propose a hermaphrodite friendly theory of complex demonstratives and personal pronouns. Since it deals with our intuitions and captures our datum, I call this theory the *naïve theory*. I argue that a theory of complex demonstratives mimics a theory of subordinate clauses; in other words, the semantics of a sentence containing a complex demonstrative mirrors the semantics of a sentence containing a subordinate clause. The latter may be a non-restrictive relative clause, an appositive, a parenthetical or the like. Consider:

(12) Campbell, the famous supermodel, is gorgeous

(13) Tim (the man with the hat) is handsome

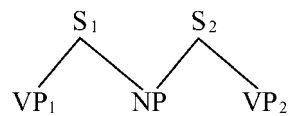
The theory I have in mind assumes that utterances like (12) and (13) express two distinct propositions. (12) expresses the proposition *that Campbell is a famous supermodel* and the distinct proposition *that Campbell is gorgeous*, while (13) expresses the propositions *that Tim is the man with the hat* and the proposition *that Tim is handsome*.⁹ I characterize these two propositions *the background*

proposition and *the official proposition* respectively. This distinction should capture the truism that a speaker of utterances like (12) and (13) primarily aims to transmit the information expressed by the official proposition. The subordinate clause is often used merely as a tool to enable the speaker to convey this information. If one says, “Campbell, the famous central defender, is gorgeous”, for example, one adds the description ‘the famous central defender’ to emphasize that one is talking about the footballer, Sol Campbell, and not using the homonymous name of the supermodel. This is analogous to saying, “Mary has been to the bank, the financial institution”, where the description ‘the financial institution’ is added merely to disambiguate the noun.

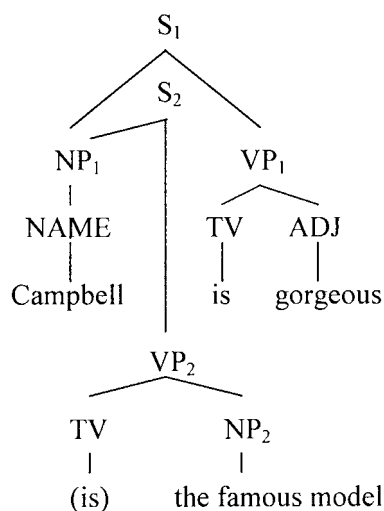
The position I have in mind bears some resemblance to Dever (2001). Dever argues that constructions with appositives, i.e., noun-headed constructions concatenated onto other terms, are the correct models with which to understand complex demonstratives (notice, however, that Dever talks about sentences while I have been talking about utterances. Dever’s sentences should be understood as sentences-in-a-context, for a sentence containing a demonstrative is context sensitive). A sentence with an appositive is, in fact, two sentences expressing two propositions:

The next question, of course, is *why* sentences with appositives express two propositions. The suggestion is that it is because such ‘sentences’ are in fact *two* sentences. (Dever, 2001, pp. 295–296)

When it comes to representing the structure of sentences containing appositives (or complex demonstratives, for that matter), Dever claims (correctly, I believe) that the syntactic trees can be multi-rooted, i.e., the sentences have a grammar that gives rise to trees where the same noun phrase is shared by both sentence:



The same noun phrase (NP) (subject) supplies different verbs phrases (VP) as component of each sentence. To illustrate this, let us consider the representation of (12):



where S_1 and S_2 share the same NP, ‘Campbell’. This representation stresses the fact that (12) contains two top-level S nodes. One dominates “Campbell is gorgeous” while the other dominates “Campbell is the famous supermodel”.¹⁰ An utterance of the former expresses the official proposition while an utterance of the latter expresses the background proposition. To be precise, (12) is a single utterance, but a single utterance can be a token of two distinct sentences, i.e. an utterance can incorporate different sentences. In our example, the subject ‘Campbell’ performs a dual role insofar as it contributes *Campbell* to both the official and the background propositions. Thus, an utterance like (12) embodies two sentences. It is for this reason that an utterance can express two distinct propositions and, as we shall now see, be true even if one of these propositions is false.

It is worth mentioning, however, that the theory I propose differs from Dever in one major aspect. While Dever follows Bach and Neale in claiming that both propositions expressed must be true in order for an utterance containing an appositive (or a complex demonstrative) to be judged to be true without hesitation, I argue that the background proposition does not affect the truth-value of the utterance. Unlike Dever, Bach and Neale, I maintain that an utterance’s truth-value is inherited from the official proposition only:

[I]t [“Aristotle, man of the people, was fond of dogs”] expresses propositions corresponding to these two sentences [“Aristotle was fond of dogs”, and “Aristotle is a man of the people”], and when the two propositions diverge in truth-value, we are left with conflicting intuitions on the truth-value of the whole sentence (as we strive, driven by a mistaken theoretical assumption that there is a one-one correlation between sentences and propositions, to resolve our intuition into a single truth-value). (Dever, 2001, p. 298)

As Neale puts it:

[A] better picture of what is going on will emerge if we say that both a descriptive proposition *and* a singular proposition are expressed. Only when both are true or both false do we feel pulled to judge the utterance to be true or false. (Neale, 1999, p. 66)

Bach shares this view:

In general, intuitions about the truth or falsity of utterances containing ACIDs [alleged conventional implicature devices] tend to ignore the secondary proposition being expressed. This is clearly what happens with utterances containing nonrestrictive relative clauses or appositives (or parentheticals), where the truth-value of the material set off between the commas (or parentheses) tends to be downplayed. . . . this is possible because such utterances do not express one composite proposition but two separately evaluable ones, one of which is peripheral to the main point of the utterance. When the secondary proposition is false but the primary one is true, intuitions about the truth or falsity of the whole utterance are forced. If we are forced to choose between true and false and we say “true”, we do so reluctantly, because we recognize that something isn’t right. (Bach, 1999, pp. 346–347)

Dever and Neale do not say whether an utterance like (14) can be true when that background proposition is false, although they do seem to indicate that it cannot be *judged* to be true. Bach, however, is more explicit. He maintains that when an utterance expresses more than one proposition (without expressing the conjunction of these propositions), the utterance need not be either true or false:

(27) [Ann’s computer, *which she bought in 1992*, crashes frequently] expresses these two propositions, but it does not express their conjunction. . . . And when the sentence does so without expressing the conjunction of these propositions, and these propositions differ in truth-value, the sentence as a whole is not assessable as simply true or simply false. (Bach, 1999, p. 351)

Bach goes on to argue that:

Although it is arbitrary to assume one sentence, one proposition, the suggestion that a sentence can express more than one proposition might still seem problematic. In fact, it is problematic within the framework of a truth-conditional semantics, because a sentence that expresses more than one proposition, as opposed to a conjunct of propositions, does not have a unitary truth condition. A semantic framework in which meanings of sentences are given not in terms of truth conditions but in terms of things that have truth conditions, namely propositions, is better suited for handling this problem. Then we can speak of the truth or falsity of the different propositions that are expressed by the utterance of one such sentence without having to judge the utterance as a whole as true or false. This would eliminate any temptation to speak of ACIDs as having “non-truth conditional meaning”. (Bach, 1999, pp. 354–255)

I am sympathetic to Bach’s suggestion that the best semantic framework for giving the meaning of an utterance (or a sentence-in-a-context) is the one which focuses on propositions (the content of the utterance) rather than the utterance’s truth conditions. Yet, I maintain that the non-unitary truth condition position (advocated by Dever, Bach and Neale) does not appear to account for the intuition that a speaker’s aim in using an utterance containing a parenthetical, an appositive or a complex demonstrative is to communicate the official proposition.¹¹ The background proposition is often used merely as a support, enabling the audience to identify the object of discourse.¹²

One could object that we cannot, from this communicative intuition alone, infer the *semantic* fact that the background and official propositions are not to be treated on a par. I do not have a knockdown argument against such an objection, just as I do not have a knockdown argument against the non-unitary truth condition view. In fact, I doubt that knockdown arguments exist in this area. The main question, however, depends on what one expects from semantics and, more precisely, on how one draws the distinction between semantics and pragmatics. I suspect that the objection that the communicative intuitions I am appealing to do not affect, or should not be taken into consideration when assessing an utterance’s semantic content, rests on a firm distinction between semantic facts and pragmatic facts. I am skeptical, however, about the possibility of a clear-cut distinction between pragmatics and semantics. Such a distinction would be easier to make within a framework akin to the ones advocated by Frege and Russell, for example. Within this

framework, which we may term the *ideal language* school, a theoretician's inquiry should concentrate on the study of an ideal (formal) language, i.e., a language deprived of the imperfections of natural languages. In this study semantics is confined to truth-conditions, while pragmatics is confined to studying the ways in which speakers use language to attain certain goals and to communicate certain information. Within this framework, the study of communication would mainly be the job of pragmatics. However, the phenomenon of indexicality (and context sensitivity in general) cannot easily be explained using this semantics/pragmatics divide. Just how much and how far can context affect an utterance's truth-conditions? As far as I know, a firm, clear and uncontroversial answer has yet to be proposed. On the other hand, if one is more willing to follow the ordinary language school inaugurated by Wittgenstein, one is more likely to take features concerning the way linguistic expressions are *used* into consideration. Within this camp, semantics can be understood as the study of the rules for the correct use of language and the meaning of an expression type is determined by the ways in which it can be correctly used. Semantics, so understood, takes into account the speaker's competencies or, at least, an ideal speaker's linguistic competences. I am not sure that a clear-cut distinction between semantics and pragmatics can be made at all within this framework. I tend to believe that semantics is pragmatically informed and *vice versa*; to paraphrase a famous Kantian dictum, I would say that semantics without pragmatics is empty while pragmatics without semantics is blind. To put it more crudely, I suspect that the semantic/pragmatic divide is neither a welcome nor a healthy distinction. At least, it is unhelpful when one focuses on the study of *natural* or *ordinary* language. For these reasons I believe that the notions of rules and conventions are more promising – or at least more primitive – when trying to analyze the meanings of linguistic expressions.¹³

Against this very idea, *viz.* the view that the background proposition does not affect the truth-value of the utterance expressing it, one may appeal to inferences of the following sort:

- (14) a. Jane (my best student) graduated with a distinction
 b. Therefore Jane is my best student

- (15) a. Sue, Paul's wife, is Jon's mistress
 b. Therefore someone is Paul's wife

If these arguments are valid, it is simply not possible for the premises (14a) and (15a) to be true and the conclusions false. The view I am proposing, however, clearly entails that these inferences are invalid. Since I claim that the truth conditions on (14a) and (15a) are inherited from the truth conditions on the official propositions (regardless of the truth conditions on the background propositions), it would be possible for (14a) and (15a) to be true and yet (14b) and (15b) to be false, for the truth conditions on the latter depend upon the truth conditions on the background propositions only.

As I have already said, I do not have a knockdown argument against the view that, for semantics reasons, both background and official propositions must be treated on a par. Having said that, I do not feel comfortable with the idea that arguments (14) and (15), as they stand, are valid. The supposed validity of an argument like (14) mirrors the alleged validity of an argument like:

- (16) a. All men are mortal
 b. Therefore, Socrates is mortal

In everyday conversation, we encounter utterances like, "If all individuals dislike war, then Mary dislikes war". This conditional is understood insofar as one assumes that Mary is an individual (and not, say, a pet), yet nothing in the utterance itself states that Mary actually is an individual. This information is *implicitly* conveyed, but this does not make that information semantically irrelevant.¹⁴ One need not cognitively process the information, let alone infer it: one simply and automatically takes it for granted. Along this line, (16) must be read as:

- (17) a. All men are mortal
 b. Socrates is a man
 c. Therefore Socrates is mortal

The same story can be told about arguments (14) and (15). Their alleged validity is suggested by a tacit premise. For (14) and (15) to be valid, they should read as:

- (18) a. Jane graduated with a distinction
 b. Jane is my best student
 c. Therefore, Jane is my best student
- (19) a. Sue is Jon's mistress
 b. Sue is Paul's wife
 c. Therefore, someone is Paul's wife

where the premise "Jane is my best student" in (18) and the premise "Sue is Paul's wife" in (19) express the background proposition. One could still object that, in stating the arguments (18a–c) and (19a–c) I should not drop the parenthetical and the relative clause. Thus the arguments should be rephrased as:¹⁵

- (18) d. Jane (*my best student*) graduated with a distinction
 e. Jane is my best student
 f. Therefore, Jane is my best student
- (19) d. Sue, *Paul's wife*, is Jon's mistress
 e. Sue is Paul's wife
 f. Therefore, someone is Paul's wife

In that case, the premise (18e) in the argument (18d–f), like the premise (19e) in the argument (19d–f), sounds redundant and suggests that arguments (14) and (15) are right as they stand, *pace* my claim. I disagree. If I am right in claiming that the truth-value of an utterance with a parenthetical or a non-restrictive relative clause is inherited from the truth-value of the official proposition, regardless of the truth-value of the background proposition, then the sentence expressing the background proposition must come into the formulation of arguments like (18) and (19) and thus the premises (18e) and (19e) are not superfluous. One could object that my strategy is *ad hoc*. Be that as it may, if one agrees with the view that an utterance of a sentence with a parenthetical, a non-restrictive relative clause, an appositive or a complex demonstrative is a token of two sentences (a single utterance can incorporate two or more sentences), then one is forced to accept the way I rephrase the arguments and one must accept that (18a–c) and (19a–c) are the best

representations insofar as the two different sentences are *separated* as distinct premises.

As further support of the thesis that an utterance containing a parenthetical has the same truth conditions as an utterance just like it but stripped of the parenthetical, we can focus on utterances such as “Snow is white” and “Snow is white, I claim”, or “Since it is Jon’s birthday he will host a party” and “Since it is Jon’s birthday he will host a party, I Suppose”. If either pair of utterances are produced in the same context (agent, time, place, and possible world), each utterance would have the same truth conditions, i.e., that snow is white or that, since it is Jon’s birthday, he will host a party. The parenthetical ‘I claim’, like the parenthetical ‘I suppose’, does not affect the truth-value of the whole utterance. ‘I’ and ‘claim’, however, do not lack a semantic value; their semantic value simply does not affect the truth-value of the utterance. Furthermore, the *force* with which an appositive or a parenthetical is put forward may well differ from the force of the main clause. One can ask, for instance: “Is Jane, the best doctor in town, already married?” The main clause is interrogative, while the subordinate clause is assertoric. Such data should further stress the fact that the subordinate clause cannot and should not be treated on a par with the main clause and, thus, that the official proposition and the background proposition cannot be treated on a par.

Moreover, the fact that the speaker’s main goal is to convey the official proposition in an utterance containing a parenthetical, an appositive or a complex demonstrative can also be stressed in focusing on the natural way one would report such utterances. I shall call this the *reporting test*. The test should capture our intuitive notion of what is said, i.e. what a speaker primarily commits herself to in uttering a given sentence. In reporting what one says with (12) and (13):

(12) Campbell, the famous supermodel, is gorgeous

(13) Tim (the man with the hat) is handsome

one need not mention the background proposition. If (12) and (13) are uttered by Jon, one could correctly report:

(20) Jon said that Campbell is gorgeous

(21) Jon said that Tim is handsome

These are perfectly appropriate reports. These reports relate the attributee, Jon, to the official proposition and are true iff Jon expressed the latter, i.e., he uttered a sentence expressing this official proposition.¹⁶ Since the report's goal is to convey the official proposition, the subordinate clause disappears. If the reports were:

(22) Jon said that Campbell, the famous supermodel, is gorgeous

(23) Jon said that Tim (the man with the hat) is handsome

the embedded subordinate clause would not be governed by the psychological prefix 'Jon said that ...'. Reports like (22) and (23) do not attribute to Jon his saying 'the famous supermodel' and 'the man with the hat'. These reports suggest that the subordinate clause is used by the *attributer*, i.e., the subordinate clause is transparent. It is for this reason that the background proposition must be dropped in a report. These reports do not suggest that John *actually uttered* these, or similar, words; they do not relate Jon to the background proposition. To do that job, the reports should be:

(24) Jon said that Campbell *is* the famous supermodel *and that* she is gorgeous

(25) Jon said that Tim *is* the man with the hat *and that* he is handsome

These reports indicate that Jon actually made two distinct utterances.^{17,18} So far the moral is that utterances like (12) and (13) express two distinct propositions, which cannot be treated on a par.

It may also be worth stressing that the position I am defending is committed to the thesis that utterances such as:

(26) Bush, the president of the USA, will meet Putin, the president of Russia, in Moscow

(27) The President of the USA, Bush, will meet the president of Russia, Putin, in Moscow

may diverge truth-conditionally, for (26) expresses the official proposition, *that Bush will meet Putin in Moscow* while (27) expresses the distinct official proposition *that the president of the USA will meet the president of Russia in Moscow*. This difference reflects the difference of stress and the different conversational entailments these utterances carry. (26) can be true even if Bush (or Putin) is not the president of the USA (or Russia), while (27) can

be true even if the president of the USA/Russia is not Bush/Putin. Once again, the background/official proposition distinction helps us to capture these important features without having to explain them away as pragmatic facts.

The theory of subordinate clauses, parentheticals, etc. easily extends to complex demonstratives. Thus, an utterance such as “That *F* is *G*” can be analyzed, roughly, as:

(28) That, who is *F*, is *G*

(28) is true if the referent is *G*, regardless of whether it is also *F*. Following the naïve view, an utterance like “He/she is *G*” will thus be analyzed as:

(29) That, who is a male/female, is *G*

(29) can thus be true even if the referent is not male/female. In the scenario I described at the beginning, utterances (1)–(4) are true. (1) and (3) express, respectively, the background proposition *that Aphrodite is a male* and the official proposition *that Aphrodite is gorgeous*, while (2) and (4) express the background proposition *that Aphrodite is a female* and the official proposition *that Aphrodite is gorgeous*. Since they all express the same official proposition, they all have the same truth conditions (and the same truth-value when uttered in the same context).

6. EVADING SOME OBJECTIONS

The obvious objection faced by the picture I proposed may be stated as follows: the naïve theory is implausible insofar as it is committed to the thesis that a demonstrative can succeed in singling out an object of discourse, even if the latter does not satisfy the nominal part of the demonstrative. Instead of a fault of the picture I proposed, I take this to be a merit. Imagine that, pointing toward an individual drinking martini, one says: “That woman is drinking martini”. As it happens, the speaker is not pointing toward a woman but toward a man, Jon (disguised as a woman), or toward a mannequin.¹⁹ If the interlocutor is aware that the supposed referent is not a woman, she can correct the speaker. How is the interlocutor able to rectify the speaker if ‘that woman’ is considered to be an empty term?²⁰ One can mention several other examples in favor of my account.

For instance, suppose that, whilst pointing towards a red spot on a distant hill, one says: “That tiny red spot is my house” or “I live in that tiny red spot”. Would we say that the speaker did not succeed in referring to her house because, literally speaking, one cannot live in a tiny red spot?

The picture I have in mind does *not* commit us to the thesis that a complex demonstrative can never be empty. If one points toward a corner whilst hallucinating (or drugged) and says, “That woman is charming” when no one is there, ‘that woman’ is empty. All I am committed to is that the *success* of reference does not rest on the referent satisfying the nominal part of a demonstrative. Think of words as tools, having determinate functions. The proper function of a screwdriver, for instance, is to drive screws in. One can nonetheless succeed in driving a screw using a knife, whose proper function is to cut things. We would not say that one did not drive the screw, i.e., that one did not reach one’s goal, because one used a knife. A similar story can be told about complex demonstratives. The proper function of ‘that F’ is to draw the audience’s attention to the demonstrated object, (supposedly) satisfying the nominal ‘F’. The demonstrative may reach its goal, i.e., pick out an object of discourse, even if the latter is not *F*. Along this line we can say that complex demonstratives are *conventionally* designed to pick out an object of discourse even if the latter does not satisfy the nominal part of the complex demonstrative. The nominal part is conventionally conceived as an aid used to single out a referent and, as such, it contributes to the expression of the *background* proposition(s).

The second obvious criticism that the picture I have in mind faces is inspired by Kripke and rests on the speaker reference/semantic reference distinction.²¹ One could argue that, although the complex demonstrative is an empty term, the speaker may succeed in referring to a given item and communicate something about the latter. If one adopts this line, one commits oneself to the distinction between what is, strictly speaking, said (semantics) and what is communicated (pragmatics).²² This is, without doubt, a well-motivated distinction (see Grice) and, indeed, I have no principled objection against it. With “It is cold in here”, one may say something, i.e., *that it is cold here* and communicate something else, e.g., *Please close the window*. But should we appeal to this distinction in handling

complex demonstratives and the data I have been discussing? Do we need to distinguish between what is said and what is communicated when complex demonstratives and the pronouns 'he' and 'she' are involved? Should not we welcome a unified and more economical account where what is said *is* what is communicated? Even though I am sympathetic to Kripke's distinction, I do not think that one should appeal to it when dealing with complex demonstratives. If one were to assume (along with Braun) the character approach to complex demonstratives, one is likely to appeal to the speaker reference/semantic reference distinction in order to capture the intuition that one can successfully communicate something when the speaker reference and the semantic reference differ. In particular, one might appeal to the distinction in order to capture the fact that the speaker can reach her communicative goal, even when the object she directs her attention toward does not satisfy the nominal part of complex demonstrative. If one adopts the position I have put forward, however, one does not need to appeal to the speaker reference/semantic reference distinction. If a given utterance expresses several propositions, then we can appeal both to the background proposition and the official (the communicated) proposition in accounting for a communicative interaction. We can thus capture the fact that if the object demonstrated using 'that F' is not *F* then something went wrong, yet the speaker may communicate something true. In that case, the official proposition is true whilst the background proposition is false. In other words, the naïve theory accounts for the intuition guiding the Kripke-inspired criticism, yet does not need to appeal to the speaker reference/semantic reference distinction. The background proposition helps us to capture the fact that a speaker's choice of words is not always the right one (e.g., one may use 'he' to refer to a female). If one embraces the Kripkean criticism, on the other hand, then one is committed to the view that the speaker is forced to use an empty pronoun in the Aphrodite example, for the referents of 'she' and 'he' ought to be females and males, respectively. Aphrodite could not (semantically) be referred to using a third person pronoun. This by itself is a highly embarrassing and politically incorrect consequence.

I can thus conclude that the naïve view is, unlike the three theories discussed in sections (2)–(4), hermaphrodite friendly. For

this (and other reasons I have no space to discuss in this paper), I can happily claim that the naïve view I propose (section 5) is the most attractive position on the market. For it is, if nothing else, the most politically correct stance.

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NOTES

¹ According to the scientific tradition, “*hermaphroditism*” is the technical term denoting the presence of both testicular and ovarian tissue. Within the human species, one is a *true hermaphrodite* when one has a DNA chromosome karyotype of 46 XX/XY (mosaic) independently of one’s external appearance. Hermaphrodites have two separate chromosome karyotypes, similar to siamese twins sharing one body. This can happen when two fecundated gametes merge.

² For the sake of the argument, I do not distinguish between ‘that female/male’ and ‘that woman/man’. We often use the pronoun ‘s/he’ to refer to pets, however; for this reason, I shall henceforth assimilate ‘s/he’ with ‘that male/female’, even if it may be more appropriate to assimilate it with ‘that woman/man’ or ‘that female/male person’.

³ Thanks to a referee for this journal for suggesting this.

⁴ This line of thought could be maintained by noting the fact that in some languages (e.g., German), some things that have biological gender can be referred to with genderless noun phrases (e.g., ‘das Kind’).

⁵ Barwise and Cooper (1981), Neale (1993, 1999), King (1999, 2001) and Lepore and Ludwig (2000), among others, defend, modulo some differences, this theory.

⁶ “There is an obvious condition for a complex demonstrative’s reference in a context. It is this: in every context *c*, *that N* refers in *c* to *x* only if *x* satisfies *N* in *c*” (Braun, 1994, p. 208).

⁷ Cf. Braun (1994, p. 209).

⁸ The last proviso ‘in *c*’ may sound superfluous. It helps avoiding cases of changes in sex. For *i*, the demonstrated item in *c*, may be of a different gender in a context *c** previous or posterior to *c*.

⁹ As far as I know, the first person to argue that, in order to understand the semantics of natural language, we must appeal to a multiple-proposition view is Perry. Perry (1988) distinguishes between the proposition expressed and the proposition created. The former helps us capture the intuitive idea of what is said, while the latter concerns the utterance itself and helps us capture the notion of cognitive significance. In more recent works, Perry (see especially his 2001 book) distinguishes between the incremental (in the sense of additional) truth conditions and the reflexive truth conditions. The former is what is said while the latter concerns the utterance itself and expresses the conditions it must satisfy in order to be true. Bach (1999) proposes a multiple-proposition view to deal with alleged conventional implicature devices such as ‘even’, ‘too’, ‘despite’, ‘but’, ‘therefore’, etc. and non-restrictive relative clauses as well. Bach does not mention complex demonstratives. As we shall soon see, though, Bach assumes that, as far as truth conditions are concerned, all propositions must be taken on a par. If so, utterances like (1)–(4) analyzed the way I propose cannot be said to be true/false. Only the propositions expressed by the (explicit or implicit) clauses constituting these sentences can be said to be true/false. Neale (1999) also appeals to the multiple-proposition view to deal with similar cases. Neale, however, still maintains that complex demonstratives – he calls them *demonstrative descriptions* – must be analyzed as definite descriptions. The position I advocate differs from Neale’s (1999) in two main aspects. Firstly, I do not assume that the utterance of a sentence containing a complex demonstrative, say “That F is G”, expresses a singular and a descriptive proposition. According to the position I have in mind, “That F is G” expresses two singular propositions. Secondly, as we will see, I do not assume that the propositions must be both true or both false for us to feel confident in judging that the utterance expressing them is true or false.

¹⁰ For a more detailed discussion of the syntax of appositives and complex demonstratives (and some consequences of the multi-rooted syntax adopted), see Dever (2001). As far as complex demonstratives are concerned, an interesting consequence is that: “The multi-rooted syntax, in essence, solves the difficulties of complex demonstratives by denying that there is any such thing as a complex demonstrative. There is, on this syntactic analysis, no one syntactic unit of the form ‘that F’. The simple demonstrative ‘that’ is a component, but its association with ‘F’ is a deceptive result of the linearization of an independent sentential tree” (Dever, 2001, p. 316).

¹¹ Dever, like Bach, distinguishes between the primary proposition and the other proposition(s) expressed by an utterance containing a complex demonstrative or

an appositive. But he does not assume that the truth-value of the utterance is inherited by the primary (the official) proposition.

¹² In some cases the subordinate clause can assume a rather important role and extend beyond being a mere support for the expression of the official proposition. In that case, the speaker focuses on the background proposition, for this may be what our speaker aims to convey. Consider, for instance, an utterance such as: “Campbell, one of the greatest central defenders of this decade now playing for Arsenal, is British”. The background proposition *that Campbell is one of the greatest central defenders of this decade now playing for Arsenal* seems more important than the official proposition *that Campbell is British*. Even in that case (which, one should concede, is far from representing a paradigmatic case), I maintain that our utterance is true insofar as it inherits the truth of the official proposition. It goes without saying that the communicative interchange may focus on (and the topic of discourse may well switch to) the content of the background proposition.

¹³ If one accepts these concerns regarding the study of natural language, one should not be surprised by the fact that I appeal to speakers’ commitments and aims when trying to spell out an expression’s meaning and semantic potential, i.e., the way it contributes to the expression of a proposition or propositions and thus in determining the truth-value of the utterance in which it occurs. Along this line, one would also be more likely to appreciate the idea that the background proposition does not affect the truth-value of the utterance and that an utterance’s truth-value is inherited from the official proposition alone.

¹⁴ Think, for instance, of semantically underdetermined sentences like “It’s raining”, “It’s 3 PM”, etc. where the relevant location and time zone affect the determination of the truth-condition on the utterance (see Perry, 1986). I discuss this issue in Corazza (2003).

¹⁵ This objection was brought to my attention by a referee of this journal.

¹⁶ For simplicity’s sake, I intentionally ignore the *de re/de dicto* distinction and assume that these reports are *de re*. Thus they are true iff they relate the attributee to the proposition s/he expresses, regardless on the wording (the *dicta*) the attributee used to express it.

¹⁷ The friend of complex demonstratives *qua* articulated terms (see section 4) could hold that “That F is G” is short for “That is F & that is G”. If this is the case (24) and (25) are what is said and (26) and (27) are actually the correct reports.

¹⁸ If one adopts a “narrow” view of semantics, one can claim that the speaker’s commitments and goals in reporting utterances with parentheticals, non-restrictive relative clauses and the like can be explained away as pragmatic features. Indeed, if one holds that the official proposition and the background proposition must be treated on a par, one can claim that reports like (20) and (21) are incomplete and that the accurate reports of (12) and (13) should be (22) and (23). Since I do not believe that the speaker’s commitments can be explained away merely as pragmatic facts, I hold that (20) and (21) are the accurate reports of (12) and (13) and that the reports (22) and (23) fail to capture Jon’s communicative aim. I concede that the reporting test may not constitute a compelling and definitive argument in

favor of the picture I propose, but if one accepts, as I do, that semantics should also handle a speaker's commitments and communicative intentions, then the reporting test provides further evidence in favor of the fact that the background proposition and the official propositions should not be treated (semantically) on a par.

¹⁹ I am thus sympathetic with Donnellan's intuition. When discussing the referential use of descriptions, Donnellan argues: "Using a definite description referentially, a speaker may say something true even though the description correctly applies to nothing" (Donnellan, 1966, p. 243).

²⁰ This is not a knockdown argument, for one may argue that the intended individual is made *pragmatically* salient, but not *semantically* referred to; so we do have an empty term *and* a (pragmatically specified) individual.

²¹ See Kripke's (1987) discussion and criticism of Donnellan's referential/attributional distinction.

²² Braun, for instance, endorses this view: "The above referential rule is concerned with the *semantic* referent of 'that spy', that is, what the term 'that spy' refers to in that context according to the semantic rules of the language. It entails that 'that spy' fails to semantically refer to Barney in the above context. But it is consistent with saying that George (the *speaker*) refers to Barney, and with saying that George (the *speaker*) asserts a proposition about Barney" (Braun, 1994, p. 210).

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