Why Bare Demonstratives Need Not Semantically Refer

JP Smit

I-theories of bare demonstratives take the semantic referent of a demonstrative to be determined by an inner state of the utterer. *E-theories* take the referent to be determined by factors external to the utterer. I argue that, on the Standard view of Communication, neither of these theories can be right. Firstly, both are committed to the existence of conventions with superfluous content. Secondly, any claim to the effect that a speaker employs the conventions associated with these theories cannot have any content, i.e. nothing can count as following these conventions. Bare demonstratives may well not be devices of semantic reference at all, i.e. may not actually contribute a referent to the propositions semantically expressed by an utterance.

1. Introduction

I-theories of bare demonstratives take the semantic referent of a demonstrative to be determined by an inner state of the utterer. These states are typically taken to be states that constitute having certain referential intentions. *E-theories* take the referent to be determined by factors external to the utterer[1]. These are typically taken to be criteria like salience, conversational relevance and the like. The issue has recently flared up again in an exchange between Gauker (2008), who defends an E-theory, and Åkerman (2009; 2010), who defends an I-theory[2].

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[1] I would like to thank Kent Bach, Adriano Palma and the two anonymous referees for suggestions that improved the paper in various ways. I would also like to thank Susan Hall for suggesting stylistic changes.

[2] I take this terminology from Åkerman (2010).

Semantic theorising generally takes one of two roughly distinguishable forms. The first is the so-called 'method of cases'. Here the theorist starts by considering our intuitive judgments about the truth-conditions of utterances and tries to develop a theory that accounts for such judgments. The second method we may call 'the method of theoretical constraints'. Here the theorist starts with some basic constraint that all semantic theories must meet, and tries to show that some class of theories is ruled out in virtue of not meeting this constraint. The two methods are, of course, not completely independent, and both have distinctive advantages and disadvantages. This is typical of case-driven and theory-driven methods of enquiry in general.

Semantic theory at present is mostly case-driven. Theories are developed in order to account for cases previously thought to be problematic, these theories are then measured by how well they account for such cases, and objections to such theories typically take the form of putative counter-examples. It is, by contrast, a distinctive feature of the Gauker-Åkerman dispute that it is largely theory-driven. The core of the dispute is Gauker's basic claim that I-theories of bare demonstratives provide a hearer with no effective method of determining the referent of a bare demonstrative (Gauker, 2008, 362). Hence such theories cannot be true. Åkerman (2009: 159), in turn, defends the I-theory by denying that it provides the hearer with no resources to determine the referent of a bare demonstrative.

My primary aim in this paper is not to adjudicate between Gauker and Åkerman, but to argue that both I-theories and E-theories violate an even more basic constraint on semantic theorising. I will argue that, if we accept the most popular and intuitive view of communication, sometimes referred to as the Standard view of communication, we are forced to conclude that both I-theories and E-theories are fundamentally flawed. Instead we are led to a third view, distinct from both I-theories and E-theories, on which bare demonstratives are not devices of semantic reference at all.

2. The Standard view of communication

On the *Standard view*, communication is a matter of speakers trying to make evident, and hearers trying to ascertain, what a speaker has in mind. Interpretation,

in other words, is a matter of 'mind-reading' (Carston, 2002, 42). What happens is that speakers perform some communicative action in order to communicate some content-ful entity that they have in mind. The hearer then uses the communicative action in order to determine what the speaker wished to communicate, effectively treating the communicative action as a clue that can be used to ascertain what the speaker tried to communicate. The Standard view is not without its critics[3], and it is far from clear how various details about this process should be fleshed out. It is, however, widely accepted among linguists and semanticists[4]. These background assumptions about communication allow us to define the following notions:

Speaker's referent: The speaker's referent of a term is the object that the utterer, upon an occasion of use of a term, is trying to draw to the attention of the hearer by uttering the term (and wishes to be understood, by the hearer, as drawing to his attention by uttering the term).

Conventional rule: The convention governing the use of a term. This is what a speaker and hearer need to know in order to be competent users of a term and may also be termed the 'linguistic meaning' of a term.

Public referent: The public referent of a term upon an occasion of use is the referent that it is most rational to believe, based on all the publicly available evidence, that the speaker has in mind. 'Publicly available evidence' includes criteria like salience, conversational relevance, whether assigning the referent accords with interpretive charity, and the like.

A simple example can serve to illustrate the concepts that the above definitions try to capture. Suppose that Alex and Bob are having lunch. Alex takes a bite of his steak, chews slowly and then scrunches up his face in disgust. He then says "I am not going to eat this". From this evidence Bob, quite reasonably, deduces that Alex

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[3] See, for instance, Buchanan (2010). In referring to this view as the 'Standard view' of communication I follow Buchanan's usage.

[4] It is endorsed (under different labels) by, for instance, Carston (2002), Åkerman (2010) and Wettstein (1984).

attempted to communicate that *Alex is not going to eat the steak.* Alex, however, was so disgusted by the steak that he completely lost his appetite, and actually intended to communicate that *Alex is not going to eat any of the food on his plate.* Bob is now mistaken about what Alex meant to communicate, but the fault lies with Alex as he made a mistake in judging the conversational context.

In the above case Alex used the bare demonstrative 'this' in order to bring the food on his plate to Bob's attention. Hence the food on Alex's plate was the speaker's referent of his utterance of 'this'. Alex's communicative action, however, was unsuccessful. This was due to Alex's misjudgment of what was mutually understood about the circumstances in which the utterance was made. Due to Alex's misjudgment the speaker's referent and the public referent are different objects. The public referent, i.e. the referent that, based on his utterance and the contextual evidence, it would be most rational to believe he was trying to draw attention to, is the steak on his plate.

The above distinction applies quite generally and that the need for these notions also arises when discussing ordinary referential devices like names. Suppose that a speaker utters the name 'Gates', but is mistaken about the conventional referent of 'Gates'. He has learned the convention concerning 'Gates' incorrectly and believes that 'Gates' refers to Buffett. If it is obvious to a hearer who the speaker intends to refer to we can describe the situation by saying that Buffett is the speaker's referent of his utterance of 'Gates', Gates is the conventional referent and Buffett is the public referent.

Note that the I-theorist and E-theorist, if they accept the Standard view, would agree that there is something that the speaker has in mind and that there is publicly available linguistic and non-linguistic evidence that enables a hearer to try and determine what a speaker has in mind. Both parties also agree that a speaker will tailor his usage of a bare demonstrative to the norm that it should be possible, for a hearer, to exploit this public evidence in order to determine what the speaker has in mind. Given all this agreement it may well be wondered what there remains for them to debate about. The debate cannot be about the determination of the speaker's referent, as this, per definition, is determined in terms of the speaker's intention.

Similarly the dispute cannot be about the determination of the public referent, as this is, by definition, determined in terms of publicly available criteria. Rather the dispute is about what role the bare demonstrative 'this' plays in facilitating the communicative process. Or, in terms of the concepts defined above, the dispute is about the *conventional rule* associated with a bare demonstrative. The essence of the respective positions can be defined as follows:

I-theory convention: A bare demonstrative, upon an occasion of use, refers to the speaker's referent of the utterer.

E-theory convention: A bare demonstrative, upon an occasion of use, refers to the public referent of the utterance.

Before proceeding to the arguments against these views I will clarify a few matters concerning the scope of my arguments and other issues.

3. The scope of the arguments

There is a subtlety concerning the definition of an E-theory convention that needs to be addressed. My argument here will only concern E-theories of the above type, i.e. E-theories that, in effect, claim that the semantic referent of an utterance of a bare demonstrative is the public referent. A paradigm of this sort of theory is Wettstein's view that the referent of a bare demonstrative is the object that best fits all the cues that a "reasonable and attentive addressee will take the speaker to be exploiting" in order to communicate what they have in mind (1984, 73). One could formulate E-theories that differ from this in two distinct ways. The first type of theory would be one that makes no reference to what a rational (or reasonable or competent, etc.) addressee would take the speaker to have in mind, as it is claimed that the referent can be given in terms of some mechanical rule that has no need of such concepts. In this way McGinn has argued that the the referent of a demonstrative is strictly determined by the spatio-temporal relations between the speaker and his environment (McGinn, 1981). My arguments do nothing to undermine such views, but this does not matter much. Such theories are rare, generally held to be implausible and have

been adequately criticized by others[5]. Hence I take it that this does not seriously limit the scope of my arguments.

The second type of theory that makes no reference to what a rational (or reasonable or competent, etc.) addressee would take the speaker to have in mind, is one that does so in virtue of denying that interpretation is a matter of determining what a speaker has in mind, i.e. the Standard view of communication. This would be a position like that of Gauker, who explicitly denies the Standard view (2008, 361). On Gauker's view the referent of a bare demonstrative is the object that best fits an "all-things-considered judgment" (2008, 366) concerning which object best fits a number of external 'accessibility criteria' like salience, prior reference, relevance, interpretive charity and the like (2008, 364 - 365). These criteria are not meant as criteria that allow a hearer to *infer* what a speaker has in mind, as Gauker does not believe that communication is a matter of communicating what someone has in mind. Rather they are simply criteria that determine the semantic reference of bare demonstratives. Note that Gauker does seem to admit, however, that such criteria would be among the evidence that one would use if you were to try and infer the speaker's intention (2008, 368). The important point, however, is that Gauker's criteria do not determine semantic reference *in virtue of* being the evidence that a rational hearer would use in order to determine what a speaker has in mind and so his proposed convention makes no reference to notions like rationality, reasonableness, competence and the like.

Note that a number of the problems with Gauker's account would immediately disappear if he accepted the Standard view and treated the semantic role of his criteria as *evidentiary*, i.e. as allowing hearers to infer intentions. Firstly, it would explain why these criteria are the ones that are relevant to the communicative role of demonstratives, as it is not clear how Gauker arrived at these criteria, and not others, if he was not trying to identify criteria that allow one to determine the speaker's intentions. Secondly, it would determine what other criteria there could be that fulfill the same role[6]. Thirdly, it would determine how these criteria should be weighted in any given case in order to arrive at a verdict. On the Standard view the weighting of these criteria would be a matter of determining their relative strength as

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[5] See, for instance, Wettstein's fine critique of McGinn's theory (Wettstein, 1984, 76 - 78).

[6] Gauker states that his list of criteria is not meant to be exhaustive (2008, 365).

proxies for speaker intention. This may be difficult to determine in practice, but at least it is clear *what* such an inquiry would amount to.

My arguments, however, only concern E-theories that are characterized in terms of the 'public referent', i.e. in terms of what a reasonable, rational or competent speaker would judge to be the speaker's referent. Hence my arguments, apart from the brief remarks above, do not apply to Gauker's views. This is regrettable, but one has to start somewhere. The most popular and intuitive view of communication, i.e. the Standard view, seems a good place to start.

4. Further clarifications

I have characterized I-theories and E-theories as being committed to the claim that certain conventions exist in English that govern the use of bare demonstratives. Theorists generally do not cast their disputes as being about the content of the relevant conventions, but this should not mislead us into thinking that they are not thusly committed. Theorists tend to follow in stating their theories in terms of either the 'character' of a bare demonstrative, or about the determinants of the content of the 'context'[7] of a bare demonstrative, as Kaplan uses these terms. Note that Kaplan himself has stated that "character is set by linguistic conventions" (Kaplan, 1989a, 505)[8] and many have equated the 'character' of an indexical with the 'linguistic rule' governing its use. No-one has denied such claims and it is hard to see how or why one would do so. Hence I interpret claims about the character of a bare demonstrative, or about the determinants of the content of the context of a bare demonstrative, as committing the theorist to some claim about the content of some convention in natural language. In this way an I-theorist claim like 'the content of the context of an utterance of a bare demonstrative is determined by the speaker's intention' commits one to the claim that there is a convention that a bare demonstrative refers to what

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[7] Gauker frames the issue in this Kaplanian way when he writes that the debate is about 'the determinants of the content of a context' (2008, 361) of a bare demonstrative, i.e. the Kaplanian character of a bare demonstrative.

[8] Kaplan endorses an I-theory in "Afterthoughts" (1989b, 582), after originally defending something like an E-theory in "Demonstratives" (1989a, 514).

the speaker intends to refer to, etc. This, presumably, is uncontroversial. Note that, if a theorist is *not* trying to determine the conventionally determined content of some natural language expression, then he is effectively changing the topic from the one studied by Kaplan and others.

The above issue is especially relevant as I wish to pre-empt objections that stem from a terminological confusion concerning the term 'conventionalism'. In Kaplan's original theory the context that determines the referent of a pure indexical is always the context of utterance. Some theorists[9] have, in order to deal with answering machine cases and the like, proposed theories in which the context that determines reference is not the context that we would ordinarily judge to be the context of utterance, but, for instance, the context in which a message is heard. The view that the semantically relevant *context* is determined by public conventions concerning the use of post-it notes, answering phones and the like (Corazza et al., 2002) goes under the banner of 'conventionalism'. Such 'conventionalism' about context-determination is a controversial matter that should not be confused with the truism that the dispute between I-theories and E-theories of content-determination is a dispute between rival views of the conventions governing bare demonstratives. More importantly, note that to deny such 'conventionalism' about the determination of the semantically relevant context[10] is *not* to deny that the dispute between I-theories and E-theories of content-determination is a dispute about what the conventions governing bare demonstratives are. An I-theorist, as explained above, is committed to the view that it is a convention of English that the semantic referent of an utterance of 'this' (or 'that') is the speaker's referent. The fact that such a theorist may also deny a position called 'conventionalism' about context-determination does not change the fact that they are committed to a positive view about the conventions governing 'this' and 'that'.

5. The Efficiency argument

I-theorists are those who claim that the semantic referent of a bare demonstrative is the speaker's referent, whereas E-theorists are those who claim that the semantic referent of a bare demonstrative is the public referent. All further use of the terms 'I-

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[9] See, for instance, Siddelle (1991).

[10] See, for instance, Predelli (1998).

theorist' and 'E-theorist' should be understood as referring to these positions only, as qualified and explained above. These are rival theories about the conventional rules governing the use of terms like 'this' and 'that' in English, etc. This means that we can, independently of whether such conventions are best understood in Kaplanian terms, evaluate these positions by considering whether they meet general constraints applicable to linguistic conventions. Both violate the following principle, which I will call the *Efficiency Principle*.

> Efficiency Principle (hereafter EP): A linguistic convention will not have content that serves no communicative or expressive function.

The EP expresses the intuition that the content of a convention will serve some or other function. In other words, there will not be content in conventions that serve as the proverbial Wittgensteinian wheel that turns nothing else in the machine. I trust that this is uncontroversial. If someone wishes to doubt the EP they would have to show why, if a part of the content of a certain convention serves no function, it could persist despite language users having no incentive to keep it from fading away. On the Standard view of communication the function of the content of the convention that is associated with a term is that it enables a speaker to let a hearer know what he wishes to draw his attention to. Construing the function of conventions in this way applies well to, for instance, names. The conventional content of 'Gates' is that "Gates" refers to Gates[11]. If a speaker utters 'Gates', the hearer can infer that the speaker probably wishes to draw the hearer's attention to Gates. This means that the content of the convention that 'Gates' refers to Gates has some function, i.e. that the convention associated with 'Gates' does not violate the EP.

I will argue that, on both the I-theory and E-theory of bare demonstratives, the relevant conventions have content that is not needed in order to facilitate communication. Hence both theories are committed to the existence of conventions

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[11] Of course, the (de dicto) content of the belief-state in virtue of which someone knows that 'Gates' refers to Gates cannot be just '"Gates" refers to Gates'. What such knowledge does consist in does not matter here; what matters is that there clearly are circumstances under which we would say that someone knows that 'Gates' refers to Gates.

that violate the EP. To see this, consider what a hearer confronted with an utterance of a bare demonstrative will do in order to follow the respective conventions. The hearer will first deduce that a speaker has something in mind that he wishes to draw to the attention of the hearer. This follows from the statement of either convention, added to the fact that a competent speaker has uttered a demonstrative. Call this *inference K*. The claim that an utterance of a demonstrative shows that a speaker has something in mind, however, does not exhaust the content of these conventions. This can be seen from the fact that, on both theories, a hearer can draw inference K when confronted with an utterance of a bare demonstrative. Hence the fact that the use of bare demonstratives sanctions inference K does not, by itself, vindicate either theory.

The problems with I-theories and E-theories become evident when we consider what the convention advises the hearer to do after he has drawn inference K. On an I-theory he now has to try and determine the speaker's referent of the utterance, whereas on an E-theory he has to determine the public referent. The first problem is that both of these processes are likely to be identical. On the E-theory a hearer will try to rationally exploit external evidence in order to determine what the speaker has in mind, but a rational hearer who follows an I-theory convention will do exactly the same thing. If a hearer is rational then he will realize that his only realistic method of grasping what the speaker is trying to convey is to rationally exploit the external evidence. In other words, on both the I-theory and the E-theory the hearer will follow the same actions, but for different reasons. On the E-theory the hearer will rationally exploit the external evidence in virtue of being advised to do so by the E-theory conventions. On an I-theory a hearer will do the same thing, but this time it will be done partly in virtue of following an I-theory convention, and partly in virtue of following basic principles of rationality.

There is a bigger problem though. This is that once the hearer has drawn inference K, he will try and determine the speaker's referent *anyway*, just in virtue of the fact that he is engaged in communication. The problem, simply put, is that, on the Standard view of communication, communication simply is a matter of trying to usefully express, on the part of the speaker, and determine, on the part of the hearer, what the speaker has in mind. Hence, once a hearer draws inference K, he will try and determine the speaker's referent of the uttered demonstrative in virtue of the fact

that interpretation just *is* the attempt to determine what a speaker has in mind. The hearer does not need to be told to do so by a linguistic convention. Hence any convention that includes such content violates the EP.

Conventions that instruct the hearer to take an interest in the speaker's referent are superfluous, as the hearer will do this anyway. The absurdity of such conventions become even more evident when we consider other linguistic acts that also give rise to inference K and where a hearer will also try to determine the speaker's referent. Take, for instance, the case of names. If a speaker utters the name 'Canada', the hearer will also draw inference K. He will then, provided he knows the convention that 'Canada' refers to Canada, try and determine the speaker's referent of the utterance of 'Canada', starting with the default assumption that Canada is the speaker's referent of this utterance of 'Canada'. The hearer, of course, cannot simply assume that Canada is the speaker's referent of the utterance of 'Canada', as the speaker may not be a competent user of the name 'Canada'. The hearer, however, does not use the convention and contextual evidence in order to try and determine the speaker's referent of 'Canada' in virtue of the fact that the *convention* governing 'Canada' advises him to do so. Rather, on the Standard view, this is something that happens in virtue of the fact that determining the relevant intentions of the speaker is what communication is all about. No semanticist has ever proposed that it is part of the job of semantics to account for such behaviour where *names* are concerned as such behaviour is clearly not conventionally motivated, but occurs in virtue of the communicative context. The same applies to demonstratives. Including an injunction to determine the speaker's referent of a *name* in the convention governing names would violate the EP as the injunction is one that the speaker would follow anyway, without being told to do so by a convention. The I-theory violates the EP in the same way, as any content that it may have, over and above what is needed to justify inference K, is superfluous.

The general claim that a consideration of the function of linguistic conventions shows that the conventional rule for a bare demonstrative cannot be formulated using the notion of 'speaker's reference' is not novel[12]. What has not generally been realized,

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[12] Or, at least, many have claimed that viewing such intentions as a parameter of a Kaplanian context can serve no purpose. See, for instance, Schiffer (2005, 1141), who seems to end up defending an I-

however, is that such considerations also count against E-theories[13]. To see why this is so, note that the E-theory for bare demonstratives formulated above states that the referent of an utterance of a demonstrative is the public referent of the uttered demonstrative, i.e. the referent rationally determined in virtue of external factors. This means that the E-theory effectively boils down to a rule which advises the hearer to, when confronted with a use of 'that', determine the public referent, i.e. the referent that it is most rational to believe, based on the publicly available evidence, that the hearer has in mind. But, on the Standard view, this is superfluous. Once the hearer has drawn inference *K*, the hearer should, and mostly will, do this anyway. Users generally do not need to be told to try and use a rational method and exploit all the contextual evidence in order to try and determine the speaker's referent of a term that indicates that the speaker has something in mind. Rationally exploiting the available evidence is the hearer's optimal strategy when trying to determine what the hearer has in mind and hence one that the hearer has non-conventional reasons to follow. Once again, on the Standard view, when a speaker uses a *name* a hearer should also rationally exploit all the contextual evidence in order to determine whether the conventional referent of the name really is the speaker's referent. Yet we do not feel any pressing need to include this injunction in the convention governing names. Explicitly including this in the convention governing bare demonstratives is no less absurd.

Both I-theory and E-theory violate the EP in virtue of including content that amounts to no more than a wheel that turns nothing else in the machine. Call this the *Efficiency objection.* The user's interest in the speaker's referent and the public referent is already secured in virtue of the Standard view of communication, in conjunction with inference *K* and minimal principles of epistemic rationality. Conventions that advise users to take such an interest serve no purpose. Hence, based on the Efficiency principle, we can conclude that there are no such conventions.

The Efficiency objection points out that I-theory conventions and E-theory conventions serve no purpose. Note that it did, however, assume that such principles are coherent. Hence it assumes that we can imagine an inefficient language in which

theory of sorts despite making this type of argument.

[13]However, Schiffer (2005, 1141) contains remarks that indicate a similar view of E-theories.

such conventions operate. The second objection is much more basic and shows that there cannot be any such conventions as the very idea of such conventions is incoherent.

6. The Category mistake argument

Thus far I have tacitly presupposed a certain basic principle concerning conventions. The principle concerned is that the actions rationalized by a convention are *constitutive* of the content of the convention. A simple way of putting this is that, for any convention, there must be some set of actions that count as following the convention and a set of actions that count as violating the convention. A convention that rationalizes no action cannot be a convention at all.

The principle stated above gives rise to the Efficiency objection and allows for a simple restatement of it. If anything is to count as being the actions that are rationalized in virtue of the content of an I-theory, then it must be the action, on the part of the speaker, of using a bare demonstrative to indicate that he has some object in mind that he wishes to be understood by the hearer as bringing to the hearer's attention in virtue of his utterance of a bare demonstrative. If anything is to count as a hearer employing an I-theory convention, then it must be the act of trying to determine the speaker's referent of an uttered bare demonstrative. Similar reasoning applies to language users who are to count as employing an E-theory. If anything is to count as a speaker employing an E-theory, then it must be the act of using a bare demonstrative to indicate that he has something in mind that can, using the external evidence, be determined by a rational hearer. If anything is to count as a hearer employing the E-theory, then it must be the act of, when confronted with the use of a bare demonstrative, trying to rationally and in accord with the external evidence determine what the speaker has in mind. The problem arising from the preceding characterisation of the actions that are constitutively tied to the content of these respective conventions is that all these actions are rationalized *already* in virtue of the fact that the participants are engaged in communication and in virtue of the fact that rationally exploiting evidence is the optimal strategy for determining anything whatsoever. Hence conventions with such content are superfluous.

The above restatement of the Efficiency objection allows for a simple statement of the second problem concerning the I-theory and E-theory. This is a much deeper problem and, in effect, gives rise to the Efficiency objection. The problem is not merely that these putative conventions include content that cannot, *qua* linguistic conventions, do any useful work. Rather the problem is that no actions can count as following these conventions *qua* conventions. But, as the conventions are constitutively tied to the actions that they rationalize, this means that there cannot be any such conventions at all.

To justify the above claim, suppose someone introduces a putative convention, call it 'convention D', that 'this' semantically refers to whatever, upon an occasion of use, is the speaker's reference of 'this'. Suppose that everyone tries their best to follow this convention. What would a person do if confronted by a use of 'this'? The first thing the hearer would do, assuming the speaker is a competent user of language, is to draw inference *K*. So far, so good, but what would constitute following the *rest* of convention D, i.e. acting in accordance with the stipulation that the speaker's referent is also the semantic referent? Here we meet with the surprising fact that *nothing* can conceivably count as following or not following the second part of Convention D. The problem is that any conceivable action that accords or does not accord with such principles would *count as* doing something radically different from following or violating a convention. To see this, note that the hearer, after drawing inference *K*, would then try to determine what the speaker has in mind. This, however, would not show that the hearer is following convention D. Rather, on the Standard view of communication, this just counts as showing that the hearer is engaged in the *practice of communication*. His actions are in accord with a constitutive principle of communication, and hence cannot also be construed as being in accord with a linguistic convention.

In a similar way, if the hearer 'violated' convention D by, for instance, trying to imagine what the utterance would have meant if the sentence expressed had been uttered by someone else, this would not count as a violation of a linguistic convention. Rather it would count as no longer trying to interpret the speaker's utterance, i.e. as no longer being engaged in a communicative interaction at all. Similar reasoning applies to the E-theory. Consider an E-theory convention that

stipulatively defines a demonstrative in terms of its public referent. If anything is to count as violating such a putative 'convention', then it would have to be some action where the hearer does not try to rationally, and based on the evidence, try to determine what the speaker most likely has in mind. Consider, for instance, a hearer who tries to determine the speaker's referent of an uttered bare demonstrative by consulting astrology books. Such a hearer is not violating a conventional principle. Rather the hearer is *failing to use his optimal strategy.* The converse applies to a hearer who *does* follow a rational method in determining what the speaker most likely has in mind. Such a speaker is not following conventional principles of a natural language, but is simply acting in a way that is epistemically optimal. Hence the very idea of I-theory and E-theory conventions is incoherent, as these principles rationalize no action. It is constitutive of the existence of a convention that it must rationalize some actions, but, crucially, all the actions that we may wish to ascribe to such 'conventions' *turn out not to be actions rationalized by a convention at all.*

In the final analysis, the problem is not that I-theory conventions and E-theory conventions do not really differ in the actions that they rationalize, or that they violate the EP. The problem with I-theories and E-theories is that the principles that the speaker and hearer are supposed to follow are simply not conventions. Rather they are constitutive principles of communication and optimal epistemic strategies, and hence the very idea of such conventions is incoherent. This is due to the basic fact that there is a matter of fact as to whether a certain action counts as acting in accord with a conventional principle or acting in accord with a non-conventional principle. *We cannot simply stipulate that a certain set of actions are to count as following a conventional principle.* Note that this is so even in the extreme case of language users thinking that they have stipulated such 'conventions' and explicitly calling these principles 'conventions'. To see this, note that something like, for instance, the act of trying to drive faster by stepping on the gas cannot count as following a convention, even if all drivers were confused enough to think that they are following a convention when doing so and were to explicitly claim that doing so constitutes following a convention. The principle that, all else being equal and given typical automotive design, stepping on the gas will make a car go faster, is a matter of physics. Calling it a convention is simply wrong.

The same goes for the case of stipulating that the semantic referent of a bare demonstrative is the speaker's referent or public referent. If we look at the actions putatively rationalized by such a 'stipulation' and constitutive of the content of such a 'stipulation', we see that none of these actions, over and above drawing inference K, can count as following a conventional principle. The hearer's act of trying to determine the speaker's referent is an action in accordance with a constitutive, non-conventional principle of communication. In a similar manner the act of taking evidence into account when trying to determine the speaker's referent is an action in accordance with optimal epistemic practice. Explicitly saying that these and related actions amount to following a convention, can, as was the case with the act of stepping on the gas in order to go faster, not change this. Yet that is precisely what we are saying if we insist that we have 'stipulated' that the speaker's referent (or public referent) is the semantic referent. This means that the very idea of 'stipulating convention D' is incoherent as it commits a kind of category mistake. Such 'conventions' rationalize no action *qua* conventions and hence cannot be conventions[14]. Call this problem the *Category mistake argument.*

Another way of making the above point is by considering the most plausible view of conventions, namely Lewis's construal of conventions as coordination games[15] (Lewis, 1969). On this view, convention-generated regularities are those that are contingently brought about by communal human action and that typically only reflect one solution picked from multiple equilibria. In this way we may drive on the left, but

[14] These arguments seem to apply quite generally. If so, then the very idea of any convention attached to any linguistic element being defined in terms of what the speaker intends, or what the external, non-linguistic evidence indicates a speaker intends, may be incoherent. This means that - perhaps - theories of pronouns according to which 'he' means 'the intended male' (I-theory) or 'the salient male' (E-theory) can be ruled out on principle. The same would apply to other linguistic items where appeals to intention or salience (broadly understood) are sometimes made. (These would include, for instance, incomplete definite descriptions, supposedly 'implicit' quantifier domain restriction, the determination of the context of an indexical, etc.) Addressing this topic any further is beyond the scope of this paper.

[15] This version of the argument can be made independently of the Standard view, though I will not attempt to do so here.

may as well have driven on the right; we use 'Kripke' to refer to Kripke, but may as well have used 'Tendulkar'; etc. On such a Lewissian construal it is plain that there cannot be I-theory or E-theory conventions. The regularity that motivates drawing inference K from the use of the bare demonstrative 'this', namely the regularity resulting from the practice of a speaker using 'this' when he has some object in mind that he would like to draw to the attention of the hearer, is clearly convention-generated as our society may as well have used 'yis' or 'doga' in a similar way. But, as pointed out earlier, this only justifies inference K, and is not sufficient to motivate I-theories or E-theories. The only 'regularities' that could conceivably play the role of justifying I-theories and E-theories, are, as explained earlier, the practice of trying to determine what the speaker has in mind when trying to communicate (I-theory) and the practice of rationally employing evidence when trying to determine what the speaker has in mind (E-theory). But these are not, as is the case with convention-generated regularities, even close to being regularities that are contingently generated by communal human action as solutions selected from multiple equilibria. On the Standard view of communication the link between communication and trying to determine what a speaker has in mind (I-theory) is not a contingent, conventional one, but a conceptual link that could not have been different. The link between trying to determine what someone has in mind and rationally using evidence to do so (E-theory) is that the latter strategy is an optimal way of performing the former task. Rationally using evidence in order to interpret an utterance is not simply one method that was contingently selected from many equally efficient methods, and therefore such behaviour cannot amount to following a convention. Hence, by reflecting on the nature of conventions, we can see that the behaviour that I-theories and E-theories are implicitly committed to construing as conventional cannot be so. The theories commit a kind of category mistake.

On the Standard view of communication a speaker who uses a bare demonstrative does so as he wishes to bring some object to the attention of the hearer, and the hearer should rationally use the contextual evidence in order to try and identify this object. Such aims, however, have nothing to do with semantics. This point is generally recognized where names are concerned and equally applies to bare demonstratives. The mistake behind both I-theories and E-theories is that theorists

have misconstrued facts about communication *as such* as facts about the conventions governing bare demonstratives.

The foregoing arguments raise the question as to how theorists have been misled in this way. I assume that theorists are drawn to either I-theories or E-theories, of whatever type, as it is generally thought that these are the only options available for giving an account of bare demonstratives. This view is presumably due to a deeper assumption to the effect that bare demonstratives are devices of reference, i.e. that they do in fact semantically refer in virtue of an associated convention. If we make this assumption, then the obvious contenders for the role of being the referent of a bare demonstrative seem to be the speaker's referent and the public referent. Neither of these options, however, can be made to work.

My main concern in this paper is critical, i.e. to show that the two seemingly most plausible views of bare demonstratives are, in fact, incoherent. The above arguments, however, strongly suggest that, unless we reject the Standard view, we need to find an account of bare demonstratives according to which they do not semantically refer and yet the hearer is justified in drawing inference *K*. On such a view, as Bach puts it, "the speaker's referential intention determines speaker's reference, but it does not determine semantic reference, except in a pickwickian way" (2006, 546)[16]. In the rest of this paper I will try to show that such a view may be more palatable than is generally realized. I will, firstly, show how well such an approach fits with an approach to semantics that has recently become influential, and, secondly, that we can have a semantic treatment of bare demonstratives that render them non-referential.

7. The non-referential view of bare demonstratives and non-truth conditional views of sentence content

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[16] Bach is occasionally, based on his defence of I-theories against criticism and some potentially misleading formulations, classified as an I-theorist. See, for instance, Åkerman (2010). Bach's writings, however, never explicitly commit to an I-theory. In fact, formulations like the one quoted above have hinted at a view on which bare demonstratives do not semantically refer at all.

The obvious objection to a non-referential treatment of bare demonstratives would be that this would render any sentence in which a bare demonstrative is used non-truth conditional, i.e. that its conventional content would not fully determine a proposition with unique truth-conditions. Concerning this objection I join an ever-increasing chorus of theorists who say, in effect, so what? A number of semanticists have claimed that sentences typically do not, in fact, semantically express propositions with fully determined, unique truth-conditions. In this way Carston has claimed that the 'semantic content' expressed by a sentence can be no more than 'context-independent linguistically encoded meaning' (2008, 322), Soames has claimed that sentences frequently only give a 'partial specification' of a proposition (2009, 280) and Bach has claimed that sentences typically only express a 'propositional radical' (1994, 269). All of these fall far short of being or determining a proposition with fully determinate truth-conditions. These discussions have typically been conducted in terms of sentences in general, and not in terms of subsentential elements like demonstratives, but the same considerations apply. Note that these theorists do not, of course, deny that the speaker attempts to communicate some truth-conditional entity, or that the hearer typically ends up grasping some truth-conditional entity. Rather they just claim that this entity is not determined purely semantically (even if we include contextual factors in cases where the semantic conventions make explicit reference to definite elements of the context, as with pure indexicals). What they typically claim is that semantics only determines a 'gappy' proposition, to be fleshed out by the hearer using probabilistic reasoning and exploiting various facts about the context, broadly understood.

The link between bare demonstratives and general issues concerning non-truth conditionality can be seen by looking at a favourite example of those who embrace the non-truth-conditional view. Consider the following sentences:

    (1) Bob is ready.
    (2) Rob has totally missed that.

Carston and others do not view an utterance of (1) as expressing a proposition with fully determined truth-conditions. The use of 'is ready' just raises the question 'ready for what?'. An utterance of (1), however, can be used to communicate in a context

where the speaker knows that the external evidence is sufficiently strong that a rational hearer will be able to infer what he wishes to communicate. If, for example, a speaker wishes to communicate that Bob is ready *to go to the beach*, and the context is of the required type, an utterance of (1) can serve to communicate that Bob is ready to go to the beach. This does not, however, mean that an utterance of (1) has the same semantic content as an utterance of 'Bob is ready to go to the beach', either in virtue of the speaker intention or in virtue of externally determined criteria. Rather theorists like Carston are quite content to say that an utterance of (1) does not semantically determine a fully formed proposition at all.

Similar considerations allow us to treat an utterance of (2) in an analogous way. An utterance of (2) can be used to communicate in a context where the speaker knows that the external evidence is sufficiently strong that a rational hearer will be able to infer what he wishes to communicate. If, for example, a speaker wishes to communicate that Rob has totally missed that *tennis ball*, and the context is of the required type, an utterance of (2) can serve to communicate that Rob has totally missed that tennis ball. This does not, however, mean that an utterance of (2) has the same semantic content as an utterance of 'Rob has totally missed that tennis ball', either in virtue of the speaker intention or in virtue of externally determined criteria. Rather we should be content to say that an utterance of (2) does not semantically determine a fully formed proposition at all. Attempting to derive a fully formed proposition from utterances like (2) causes numerous problems and solves none[17].

Both truth conditionalists about sentence content and referentialists about bare demonstratives think that, in the examples typically discussed, there is some content to an utterance that is not explicitly captured in its surface form. This leads to attempts to claim that this content is somehow still present in virtue of a semantic

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[17] Salmon (2002), for example, takes it to be obvious that 'that' semantically designates an object. Starting from this assumption he proposes that we should treat the context of demonstratives as including a demonstration, hence turning demonstratives into pure indexicals (Salmon, 2002, 519). This strategy, while ingenious, solves a problem that does not arise once we deny that bare demonstratives refer.

rule that relates a contextual element, whether it be speaker intentions or external context, to the semantic content. Non-truth conditionalists about semantic content and non-referentialists about bare demonstratives deny that we have good reason to believe that the content thought to be 'somehow present' is there at all. They also deny the main motivation for making such claims, as it turns out that we can explain communication - and how language is actually used - perfectly well without claiming that sentences typically express truth-conditional content or that bare demonstratives refer. Due to these general similarities I see the present arguments about bare demonstratives as a contribution to the project of Carston and others, i.e. the project of accounting for language usage and communication by making only minimal commitments concerning semantically determined content.

8. A semantic theory that renders bare demonstratives non-referential

One remaining problem that may stop the reader from embracing the non-referential view of bare demonstratives concerns how, if they are non-referential, we should render their semantics. In other words, what possible treatment of bare demonstratives could deliver the result that inference K is justified, so that bare demonstratives effectively function as placeholders, while still avoiding the claim that they refer? I will briefly present one theory that does deliver the result that bare demonstratives are not devices of reference at all. Note that I am merely putting this view forward so as to show that non-referential theories of bare demonstratives are at least coherent. I do not claim that this view is accurate. I present this view as it is simple, intuitive, and should serve to make non-referential views of bare demonstratives seem less strange.

Suppose we were to say that the terms 'this' and 'that', as they occur in both bare *and* complex demonstratives, have the following content:

> 'This' and 'that', as they occur in bare and complex demonstratives, mean 'dthat [the F]'

The above view, while not in accord with Kaplan's own views (see footnote 7), is Kaplanian in spirit. Kaplan's 'dthat' should here be interpreted - as he originally

intended[18] - as a "special demonstrative that requires completion by a description" (1989a, 521). The definite description 'the F' merely completes the character of an occurrence of 'dthat', but does not contribute descriptive conditions to its propositional content. Note that the view has the virtue of giving a unified account of bare and complex demonstratives.

Demonstratives like 'this', 'that', 'it', etc. do differ slightly in the referential constraints that they semantically impose. 'This' is associated with something like proximity (either in space or time), while 'that' is associated with its opposite[19]. If we assume that these referential constraints can be captured as descriptive conditions, this means demonstratives can be differentiated by having distinct character completions of the form 'the F'. This is the *only* content that the character completing definite description 'the F' will have. In this way 'this' then means something like 'dthat[the nearby x]', 'that' means something like 'dthat[the not-nearby x]', etc.

On the above view the terms 'this' and 'that' are composed of two distinct elements. The first element, and the one important for our purposes, is the special demonstrative dthat, the second part is an incomplete 'character completion', as Kaplan uses the term. If we apply this view to a complex demonstrative that includes a complete definite description, we get the result that the semantic content of such a complex demonstrative is the individual that the complete definite description is true of[20]. In this way the complex demonstrative 'this wheel of my bicycle' would mean dthat [the nearby wheel of my bicycle] and 'that wheel of my bicycle' would mean

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[18] In "Afterthoughts", Kaplan states that this was the interpretation intended in "Demonstratives", but that 'dthat' can, perhaps, also be interpreted as a rigidifying operator (Kaplan, 1989b 580 – 582).

[19] If the reader does not agree, substitute any other minimal descriptive condition. The real work in my argument will be done by 'dthat'.

[20] Corazza (2002, 319 - 320), for one, explicitly treats complex demonstratives by using dthat in this manner.

dthat [the not-nearby wheel of my bicycle]²¹. On such a view complex demonstratives of the above type would semantically refer and be directly referential. So far, so good.

Consider, however, the case of complex demonstratives that do not, if construed in the above way, include reference to a complete definite description. Take the complex demonstratives 'this wheel of my car', which would be analyzed as dthat[the nearby wheel of my car] and 'that wheel of my car', which would be analyzed as dthat[the not-nearby wheel of my car]. While the first complex demonstrative would, so analyzed, include a complete definite description, the latter complex demonstrative would not.

One way of dealing with the incompleteness of the definite description 'the not-nearby wheel of my car' and others like it, would be to say that it has 'implicit content' that renders it definite. On the Standard view, however, and in the spirit of Carston and others, we can avoid a commitment to such mysterious 'implicit content'. Rather we can simply say that the complex demonstrative 'that wheel of my car' has no semantic referent. It can, however, be used to communicate. A competent hearer will know, if confronted with such a complex demonstrative, that (1) a competent speaker has a specific object in mind that he wishes to bring to the intention of the utterer, (2) that the object is a wheel on the speaker's car, and (3) that there are enough contextual clues available to let the hearer ascertain which wheel he wishes to bring to the attention of the hearer. On the analysis presented here, conclusion (1) follows from the speaker's use of dthat, (2) follows from what was explicitly said, and (3) follows due to the fact that the speaker saw no need to exhaustively specify the object that he wishes to bring to the attention of the hearer, in conjunction with the Standard view of communication and basic principles of rationality. Hence, on the view presented here, such 'incomplete' complex

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²¹ This fits nicely with Kaplan's claim that 'dthat[the person who utters this token]' provides something like a synonym for the personal pronoun 'I' (1989a, 522). If this is accurate, then both indexicals and demonstratives have the form dthat[the F], but with the difference being that the definite description 'the F' is complete in the case of pure indexicals and incomplete in the case of demonstratives.

demonstratives can be used to communicate, *even though they do not semantically refer.*

The above view applies seamlessly to complex demonstratives that seem even less contentful, i.e. expressions like 'this man', 'that bicycle', etc. In all these cases inference (1), and the equivalents of (2) and (3), can be drawn where a complex demonstrative is appropriately used. On the Standard view of communication there is no need to say that such expressions semantically refer, as this claim is not needed to explain how communication occurs.

We can now extend this strategy to bare demonstratives. We can simply say that, being the combination of dthat and only minimal descriptive content, bare demonstratives are just an *extreme* case of a lack of descriptive content. Bare demonstratives, interpreted in this way, and as was the case with 'that wheel of my car', have no semantically determined reference. But the mere fact that the speaker used a term that creates a directly referential term when coupled with an appropriately complete set of descriptive conditions, and *could* have provided such conditions, *yet chose not to* provide such a set of conditions, is enough to let the hearer know that the speaker has some object in mind that he thinks the hearer can easily determine from the public evidence. This does not follow in virtue of the convention governing 'that', but in virtue of the pragmatics of the speaker choosing to *not* employ a complex demonstrative or some other semantically referential device. Hence, if we analyze bare demonstratives as dthat[the *F*], then someone who hears a bare demonstrative uttered can draw inference (1) and the equivalents of (2) and (3), and so communication can occur. In fact, note that communication is perfectly possible even if semantic reference is not secured very often at all.

The most obvious objection would be that it renders complex demonstratives directly referential. This matter has been controversial ever since it was denied by King (2001). King's objections could, perhaps be explained away, but I have no real view on the matter. My only concern here is to show that there is at least one coherent semantic theory according to which bare demonstratives are not devices of reference. Hence there is no need to think that a non-referential treatment of bare demonstratives will render their semantics uniquely mysterious.

9. Conclusion

In this paper I have followed what may be called the 'method of theoretical constraints'. Here one proceeds by trying to find some fundamental fact about language use and showing that it forces our hand on some specific semantic issue. In this way I have argued that, if we accept the Standard view, certain facts about linguistic conventions rule out both I-theories and E-theories of bare demonstratives. Such theories are, firstly, ruled out by the fact that our conventions are likely to be efficient. This makes it unlikely that the conventions that such theorists are committed to exist, since they are superfluous. Secondly, and much more importantly, the fact that the actions rationalized by a specific convention are constitutive of the very existence of the convention implies that there cannot, in any conceivable language, be I-theory or E-theory conventions, as none of the actions prescribed by such 'conventions' are actually actions that are rationalized by a convention[22].

Discussions of bare demonstratives – and, arguably semantic theory in general – currently mostly employ the 'method of cases'. This has led us to a stalemate of intuition swapping, with theoretical developments and distinctions only being made locally and in order to account for very specific problems. It is at this juncture where I think that an increased focus on the method of theoretical constraints, and on the nature of communication in general, can provide a way of advancing the debate.

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[22] Note that it seems *prima facie* unlikely that one could construct a semantic theory that renders sentences truth conditional that will not fall afoul of the same problems as I-theories and E-theories of bare demonstratives do.

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