



Semantics of Complex Demonstratives

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Abstract

The semantics of complex demonstratives is one of the most important and controversial topics in philosophy of language which has never been ceased to attract philosophers' interest and attention. In this article, we will examine the most fundamental problems regarding complex demonstratives including the question of whether complex demonstratives are rigid designators and directly referential or rather, are quantified expressions. We will also examine the question that in a demonstrative like "That F", does F play any role in a successful designation of the demonstrative. The last question is whether F has any share in the proposition of the content of the sentence in which the complex demonstrative has been used. Our answer to the first question is that complex demonstratives are directly referential and rigid designators. In response to the second question we will defend the idea that having the property F is a necessary condition for the referent if the complex demonstrative is to successfully refer to it, otherwise it won't refer to anything. Lastly, our answer to the third question is that F has no share in the proposition or the content of the sentence.

Keywords

complex demonstrative, direct reference, rigid designator, quantifier.



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1. Introduction

One of the most important topics in philosophy of language is the semantics of language words (subject and predicate of propositions) from the logical point of view. In this topic, the semantics of singular terms (proper names and definite descriptions), general terms and indexicals (pronouns and special and temporal expressions), which are usually the subject, hold a special status. In literature it is usual to include with indexicals other kinds of expression which have a salient and exacting semantic feature that changes as the context of use changes; for instance, demonstratives, such as "that man" or "this man"; so complex demonstratives are a kind of these words (Indexicals). In this Article, we will examine the most fundamental problems in the semantics of complex demonstratives which philosophers of language consider as serious problems. Complex demonstratives are, syntactically, expressions like "that F" or "this F" which can denote a singular object. In these expressions "this" and "that" are demonstrative pronouns and "F" is a simple or compound noun phrase. Since these expressions could also have a non-referring use, some direct reference theorists with semantic rules limited these expressions to referring pronouns; if we accept these circumstances, then will be able to pursue these fundamental problems.

2. Foundational Problems in the Semantics of Complex Demonstratives

The principal problems can be addressed in the following three questions:

1. Are complex demonstratives rigid designators and directly referential or are they rather quantified expressions?
2. In a complex demonstrative like "That F", does F play any role in a successful designation of the demonstrative? For example, must one be a student for the demonstrative 'that student' to correctly apply to him?
3. What does F share in the content of sentences in which the complex demonstrative has been used? For example, is being a student a part of the proposition which the sentence 'that student is intelligent' states?

3. Replies

In this Article, we will respond to these issues in the following way:

1. Our answer to the first question is that complex demonstratives are directly referential and rigid designators. Nothing comes between a complex demonstrative and its meaning. And only referents of a complex demonstrative are indicated by it.
2. In response to the second question, we will defend the idea that having the property F is a necessary condition for the referent if the complex

demonstrative is to successfully refer to it, otherwise it won't refer to anything. For example: in the complex demonstrative of "that F" if this expression successfully were to signify an object, the role of "F" is very important and in fact without it this complex demonstrative cannot signify anything. And therefore, in a sentence like "that F is B" we don't have any proposition for this sentence.

3. Lastly, our answer to the third question is that F has no share in the proposition or the content of the sentence. For instance, in the sentence "that F is B", if "that F" correctly denotes an object, this sentence has a proposition but the attribute "F" has no share and role in this proposition and is not a part of it. In fact, it is only the object (designation of "that F") that is a part of the proposition.

4. Conclusion

In this Article, we show that complex demonstratives like proper names, definite descriptions, general names and other indexicals have exact and explicit semantics. And with this semantics we can pursue their problems like other designators. In this Article, we reply to the three basic questions with some presuppositions. Although, other possibilities can also be considered; However, we have to remember that these sets of replies and hypotheses must have consistency and coherency in order to solve some other philosophical problems as well.

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