

# REFLEXIVE RULES AS CONTENT: THE CASE OF DEICTIC DEMONSTRATIVES

*REGRAS REFLEXIVAS COMO CONTEÚDO:  
O CASO DOS DEMONSTRATIVOS DÉITICOS*

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**ABSTRACT:** Determining what content is expressed by a demonstrative when its reference cannot be determined is a problem for those who assume that demonstrative reference is cognized by interpreters and demonstrative meaning has a mere indicative role. Here, I explore a concept of content that gives meaning a cognitively relevant role, namely, John Perry's classificatory concept of content. With that purpose, I compare the interpretation of a deictic demonstrative in two cases: for an eavesdropper and a conversational participant, aiming to show that meaning, in the form of reflexive rules, can be recruited to play the role of content when information (in the speech situation) is scarce.

**KEYWORDS:** Demonstratives. Content. Conversation. Information. Reflexive rules.

**RESUMO:** *Determinar que conteúdo é expresso por um demonstrativo quando sua referência não pode ser determinada é um problema para aqueles que supõem que seu significado tem um papel meramente indicativo. Aqui, eu exploro um conceito de conteúdo que dá ao significado um papel cognitivamente relevante, a saber, o conceito de conteúdo classificatório de John Perry. Com tal propósito, eu comparo a interpretação de um demonstrativo dêitico em dois casos: para um interceptador (eavesdropper) e um participante conversacional, objetivando mostrar que o significado, na forma de regras reflexivas, pode ser recrutado para desempenhar o papel de conteúdo sempre que a informação (na situação de fala) for escassa.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Demonstrativos. Conteúdo. Conversação. Informação. Regras Reflexivas.

Paradigmatic utterance situations are characterized by the fact that interpreters in them can successfully determine the reference of singular terms. In such cases, speakers and their interlocutors collaborate in joint communicative efforts to share information about individuals. For example, if two agents who are speakers of the same natural language, A and B, wish to catch a fly in a joint effort, it is very likely that they will occasionally use language to share information about that specific fly. Suppose that A wants to refer to the fly and chooses to use the definite description 'the fly' with that purpose. In this case, A will need to provide information that allows B to determine the reference of 'the fly' in that context of use. If, for some reason, either A or B fails to execute A's plan of referring properly,

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and the speaker's reference cannot be determined, we have an instance of what I will call a "nonparadigmatic communicative interaction"<sup>2</sup>.

I will be interested here specifically in nonparadigmatic communication involving deictic demonstratives, i.e., demonstratives accompanied by ostensive acts of demonstration. Moreover, I will focus on the content expressed by such terms when interpreters fail to determine reference. My aim is to look for a concept of content that explains cognitive significance, namely, how meaning and reference are cognized by competent speakers/interpreters of a language<sup>3</sup>. With that purpose, I will compare eavesdroppers to conversational participants.

I will start with a general characterization of demonstratives and then proceed to discuss nonparadigmatic communication. Lastly, I will present Perry's Reflexive-Referential Theory (RRT), claiming that its concept of content accounts thoroughly for eavesdropping. According to Perry, utterances of sentences with singular terms express several truth-conditional contents, depending on the information provided by each corresponding speech situation. For instance, if the information content of a situation is enough to allow for the determination of the reference of the singular term, the content expressed will be a complete proposition or, as Perry names it, the referential content of the utterance. If, otherwise, the information content fails to provide such a degree of semantic specificity, the content expressed will be bound to the utterance and the data provided by its production. Perry calls this last kind of content *reflexive*, since it is about the utterance itself and the linguistic information it carries. In the last section of this paper, after my brief presentation of Perry's multi-content approach, I will proceed to show how RRT explains the kind of content apprehended by eavesdroppers and its cognitive significance.

## 1 DEMONSTRATIVE CONTENT

It is widely accepted by philosophers of language and of linguistics that deictic demonstratives, like 'that' and 'this' in sentences (1), (2) and (3) below, are context-dependent expressions that serve the purpose of referring to perceptual objects<sup>4</sup>.

- (1) That is my girlfriend.
- (2) This is my father.
- (3) That table is nice.

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<sup>2</sup> There is more than one way in which communication can be nonparadigmatic, but I will discuss only situations in which communication is nonparadigmatic due to failure in determining reference.

<sup>3</sup> I take meaning here to be the linguistic rule that guides the use of an expression, following Strawson (1950). The concept of content I will look for is token-reflexive (PERRY, 2001) and respects what Wettstein (1985) and Taylor (1995) call the *Cognitive Constraint on Semantics*.

<sup>4</sup> To be more precise, the referents of demonstratives do not need to be concrete objects. For example, we can talk about habits, institutions and feelings with demonstratives and, also, project this mode of designation to objects that are not in the situation, such as imaginary things.

They are used to perform acts of demonstration and are associated to linguistic behavior that involves manipulation of attention with the purpose of making individuals perceptually salient to audiences. Karl Bühler (1934), for instance, who prolixly discusses *deixis* in his theory of language, affirms that members of the class of demonstrative expressions operate as orientation signs and indicators of reference.

Another way to define demonstratives is in terms of the special property of *exaphora* (Diessel, 1999, 2006); their lexical meanings stipulate that their content is to be defined relatively to facts about the utterance, which orient the interpreter outside the discourse towards the surrounding situation. Moreover, demonstratives have syntactic functions, working, for example, as pronouns – as in (1) and (2) – or noun modifiers – as in (3).

Additionally, demonstratives execute pragmatic functions<sup>5</sup>, being used to focus the hearer's attention on objects and locations, and on the informational flow of the ongoing discourse, as in (4).

(4) That is exactly what I mean.

Now, the semantic function of deictic demonstratives, according to Diessel, is finally to indicate distance relatively to the deictic center (typically the speaker), although their meanings carry information about qualities that orient the identification of the referent, such as proximity, animacy and humanness. All languages<sup>6</sup> studied by Diessel had at least two demonstratives marking points on a distance scale. Other less frequent deictic features included visibility, height etc. Qualitative features, as for example, gender and number are, notwithstanding, almost universal.

In discussing pragmatic features of demonstratives, Diessel highlights the important distinction between endophoric and exaphoric uses. Exaphoric uses require manipulation of attentional behavior towards the environment, depending greatly on extra-linguistic resources. Here, I will use the terminology *deictic demonstrative* to refer to what Diessel calls “exaphoric uses of demonstratives” and I shall focus solely on the deictic demonstrative ‘that’, used to refer to visual objects<sup>7</sup>.

Deictic demonstratives are not only context-dependent, but also context-variant, given that their semantic sensitivity to situations of use determine that their contents consistently vary from one occasion to another. Recanati (2003) succinctly summarizes the properties of context-dependence (or sensitivity) and context-variance of deictic demonstratives in the fragment below:

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<sup>5</sup> The semantic profile that philosophers and linguists often ascribe to demonstratives have to do with their pragmatic function.

<sup>6</sup> Diessel (1999) analyzed eighty-five different languages.

<sup>7</sup> For visual perception, speakers manipulate visual attentional behavior towards locations occupied by the referents. Semantic theories diverge as to whether or not identifying a visual location is the same as identifying the referent. See Kasher (1998) and Grundy (2013).

A (disambiguated) expression is *context-sensitive* or *context-dependent* if and only if its semantic content depends upon, and varies with, contextual factors such as the speaker's intention [...] The *semantic content* of an expression is that property of it which (i) must be grasped by whoever fully understands the expression, and (ii) determines the expression's extension. It can be presented as a (possibly partial, and possibly constant) function from circumstances of evaluation to extensions. The *extension* of a *prima facie* singular term (name, pronoun, definite description, etc.) is an individual object — the reference of the term (RECANATI, 2003, p. 14).

My proposal is to explore the concept of *demonstrative content* and discuss how it is related to linguistic rules. With that in mind, I explore semantic and pragmatic features of demonstratives, following Diessel's characterization.

Let us start by taking the example of (5) below.

(5) Daddy, that is Julie!

Suppose that Jane, a dentist assistant, overhears this utterance, which is part of a conversation between a man and his daughter in the waiting room. Jane is inside the equipment room and has no visual information regarding the speaker of (5), her interlocutor or the putative referent of 'that'. Call this situation S1.

In S1, there is no coordination of attentional behavior for many discernable reasons: firstly, because the interpreter is not in the same perceptual (visual) environment as the speaker; but also, and more importantly, because she is not a conversational participant. Jane is what Clark and Shaefer (1992)<sup>8</sup> call an *eavesdropper*: a listener (typically a bystander) who overhears the conversation but is not acknowledged by the participants. In S1, not only there is no *common* perceptual environment; there is no set of manifestly common assumptions. Father and daughter have an *indifferent attitude towards Jane* as well as towards what she can grasp from the utterance. Because Jane is not a part of the collaborative activity in course, her informational status is not taken into consideration in designing the conversational interaction.

The problem with conversations like S1 is that eavesdroppers apprehend linguistic information, since they are competent speakers/interpreters of a natural language, but they are not in position to take part in the specific plans of communication of which the utterances that they interpret are part. In the case of Jane, she has the necessary skills to interpret the utterance of (5) truth-conditionally, but she does not participate in the plan of referring to Julie.

In the remaining of this section, I will develop the claim that Jane, though external to the conversational setting, accesses truth-conditional content. Additionally, I compare semantic interpretation in paradigmatic situations in which the determination of reference is collaborative with the case of eavesdropping.

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<sup>8</sup> Whose categorization is inspired by Goffman (1981).

### 1.1 CONTEXT AS CONVERSATIONAL COMMON GROUND

The term ‘context’ is often understood in a vague sense, as the setting in which communicative acts take place; in this sense, it has no additional technical connotation. Context as a representation of concrete speech situations for theoretical purposes was famously systematized by David Kaplan (1989). Kaplan thought that contexts were necessary for his project of developing a logic of demonstratives, but in the end, his theory was mostly focused on the special semantic nature of other context-dependent expressions, namely, pure indexicals (‘I’, ‘here’, ‘now’). Contexts are then considered necessary, for Kaplan, to explain what he calls indexical nature of context-dependent expressions.

Kaplan’s choice of introducing contexts is, firstly, based on the idea that the semantics of indexicals should be accounted for by a bi-dimensional semantics in which contexts determine content (or the proposition expressed/what is said)<sup>9</sup>, while truth-values are determined by the circumstances in which contents are evaluated (actual and contrafactual). Secondly, it is motivated by his acknowledgment that contents can be represented as intensions. So, content can be shifted by intensional operators for time and possible world, as, for example, ‘in ten years’, ‘possibly’ and ‘necessarily’. What I will identify here as the Kaplanian context is also defined as narrow context, and it corresponds to the set of semantically relevant parameters for the determination of content, which include the agent, the time-space location and a possible world.

Narrow context is defined in contrast with broad (or wide) context, which, on its own turn, includes all information that is communicationally relevant to the successful completion of a speech act, including what the speaker means<sup>10</sup>. It is then standardly assumed that broad context differs from narrow context in that it is recruited only once the proposition expressed is determined. While narrow context is used semantically, broad context is used either post-semantically – once the proposition is determined – or pre-semantically – before the proposition is determined, to fix linguistic features.

According to Recanati (2003), philosophical literature about contextual dependence is populated with different approaches to the problem of how to represent broad context. Would its role really be limited to the pre-propositional as well as to the post-propositional stage of interpretation? If the answer is ‘yes’, we are left with the problem of explaining the interpretation of statements with demonstratives and some indexicals, as Recanati remarks:

We pretend to be able to manage the situation with a narrow notion of context, the kind we choose to deal with indexicals, when, in fact, we can only determine the referent intended by the speaker (i.e. the narrow context relevant to the Interpretation of

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<sup>9</sup> For demonstratives, the Kaplanian semantics includes a) a character, the demonstrative’s conventional meaning; b) the content (the character-in-context); and c) a directing intention manifested by a demonstration. The demonstration externalizes an inner intention to refer to a perceptual object on which the speaker has focused his attention.

<sup>10</sup> See Grice (1969, 1986).

enunciation) when we turn to pragmatic interpretation, relying on the broad context. (RECANATI, 2003, p.5)

Here, Recanati reinforces the idea that the requirement of automatism in the attribution of occasional value to sensitive expressions, that is, of "purity" of the context/meaning relation is satisfied only by a very limited number of expressions. As he points out, even the egocentric categories 'here' and 'now' – also 'today' – are amenable to interpretation in terms of broad context<sup>11</sup>. To summarize, the dispute here is between those in favor of expanding the phenomenon of context-sensitivity – moderately or radically – and those more firmly committed to minimal semantics<sup>12</sup>.

Among the contemporary philosophers who favor the alternative of representing context in terms of broad context, abdicating this exclusive concern with sensitive expressions, is Stalnaker (1999, 2002), with his conception of *discursive context*. In his view, context is not simply a theoretical construct that explains the strict phenomenon of indexicality; it is rather the implicit or presupposed "body of information that is deemed, at a certain point, as common to the participants in the discourse" (STALNAKER, 1999, p. 98). Performance of new assertions, for Stalnaker, correspond to requests to update what is being taken for granted at a moment *t*. Each new assertion must satisfy certain conditions: a) its content cannot be contrary or contradictory with respect to the propositions taken as true at that moment; and b) such propositions should be taken for granted by all participants. Context, for Stalnaker, is then the dynamic *presupposed common ground* of a conversational exchange.

Now, let us return to (5) and the case of eavesdropping. It seems evident that Jane, the father and the daughter do not share a presupposed common ground of assumptions. The propositional commitments that father and daughter undertake are not manifest to Jane, and her informational status is completely ignored by them. As a result, the daughter, call her Lily, will not worry about adjusting her plan of referring to Julie to what Jane knows before the utterance of (5), nor will she be concerned with what Jane will come to know afterwards.

If Jane were acknowledged by Lily, the girl's plan of referring would probably not involve a demonstration. Compare S1 to S2. Imagine that Lily knows Jane now, and that they are talking over the phone. Lily wants to tell Jane that she has a new friend, whose name is Julie. In this situation, she might utter something like (6):

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<sup>11</sup>For a more detailed idea of the distinction between narrow and broad context, see Corazza (2014).

<sup>12</sup> Following Corazza (2014) and his characterization of Minimalism, I understand by minimal semantics the thesis that context is necessary for the determination of the proposition expressed by an utterance if selected by morphemes of the sentence. According to minimalist semantics, the role of semantics is to determine the truth-conditions of well-formed sentences of a natural language in accordance with the principle of compositionality. Furthermore, in this view, pragmatics is kept out of truth-conditional interpretation. Unlike semantic interpretation, pragmatic interpretation is inferential, intentional and non-conventional.

- (6) Jane, do you remember Nick's sister? She is my new schoolmate. Her name is Julie.

Here, Lily takes Jane's informational status into consideration and chooses an appropriate cognitive path that will lead her interlocutor to the referent<sup>13</sup>. Though fallible, her plan explores a common ground of assumptions that includes the information that Julie has a brother named Nick, who Jane is familiar with. In S2, Lily's act of referring is, in contrast to S1, successful. Success, in this case, is measured by the level of collaboration (in what regards information sharing) between conversational participants. I will say a few words about that in the next sub-section.

### 1.1.1 CONVERSATION AND COLLABORATION

As Clark and Wilkes-Gibbs (1986) point out, in conversations, reference is established in collaboration, at least paradigmatically. The aboutness of an utterance typically becomes part of the common ground by means of coordinated behavior (acceptance, rejection, etc.) and by the systems of repair and reinforcement that permit communicational improvement whenever it is necessary:

People in conversation manage who is to talk at which times through an intricate system of turn taking [...]. Further, when one person speaks, the others not only listen but let the speaker know they are understanding-with head nods, yes's, uh huh's, and other so-called back channel responses (Duncan, 1973; Goodwin, 1981). When listeners don't understand, or when other troubles arise, they can interrupt for correction or clarification [...]. The participants also have techniques for initiating, guiding, and terminating conversations and the topics within them [...] (CLARK & WILKES-GIBBS, 1986, p. 2).

Luckily for speakers, linguistic communication is the fluid, self-preserving process described above. We have mechanisms to accommodate or exclude non-collaborative conversational contributions and recuperate the rational character of paradigmatic communication. Their idea is that all participants are mutually responsible for establishing what was said, mostly because they rely on shared information all the time, and they make assumptions about each other's statuses. Also, speakers need the repair mechanisms because accomplishing plans of referring depends greatly on how well the interlocutor is following every step, grasping every piece of information delivered by the speaker.

In our example of S1, Jane is not acknowledged by the other participants. So, there can be no division of labor in establishing what was said. Additionally, Jane, an eavesdropper, cannot take part in repair mechanisms in a pragmatically

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<sup>13</sup> The contrast here – in the cases of (5) and (6) – is between a demonstrative and a rich description of the referent. The idea is to compare two modes of designation: demonstrating and describing.

appropriate way. Eavesdroppers are excluded from what Clark & Wilkes-Gibbs call acceptance cycles.

The basic process, which might be called the acceptance cycle, consists of a presentation plus its verdict. Let  $x$ ,  $y$ , and  $z$  stand for noun phrases or their emendations. A presents  $x$  and then B evaluates it. If the verdict is not positive, then A or B must refashion that presentation. That person can offer: a repair  $x'$ , an expansion  $y$ , or a replacement  $z$ . The refashioned presentation, whether  $x'$ ,  $x + y$ , or  $z$ , is evaluated, and so on. Acceptance cycles apply iteratively, with one repair, expansion, or replacement after another, until a noun phrase is mutually accepted. With that, A and B take the process to be complete (CLARK & WILKES-GIBBS, 1986, p. 24).

A request of repair from Jane's part, in trying to determine the referent of 'that' in (5), would doubtlessly be taken as an inadequate behavior. All information Jane will be able to gather from the utterance will have to respect her status of non-participant in the conversation. So, in S1, she will fail to apprehend the content that Lily intended to express to her father. But, what content does she apprehend, as a competent speaker of English?

Lily and her father in S1 are exchanging information about the individual Julie. If Lily's plan of referring succeeds, he will be able to identify the *demonstratum* of 'that', with the help of some ostensive act that makes Julie salient. The conventional meaning of 'that' will accomplish its task in indicating which individual in the perceptual environment it denotes, if and only if it offers the adequate conditions of identification in that context of use. In a paradigmatic situation, Lily's father will apprehend the following truth-conditions, where the boldface marks the contribution made by the demonstrative to the proposition expressed:

(P5) **Julie** is named 'Julie'.

However, (P5) is not what Jane apprehends. Because she has scarce information in S1, all she has at her disposal are the conventional meanings of the expressions used by Lily in uttering (5), and the little she knows about the production of that token. Thus, it seems that Jane accesses something like (P'5), where the italics mark the conditions of identification carried by the conventional meaning of 'that':

(P'5) That *the individual made salient by the speaker of (5), standing at distance  $d$  relatively to the speaker*, is named 'Julie'.

Now, compare S1 with a new situation, S3. In S3, Jane sees the speaker, the interlocutor and the other girl, who is the referent of 'that'. In this communicative situation, Jane accesses (P5). She identifies the individual which the utterance of (5) is about and the conditions in which that utterance is true. In contrasting S3

and S1, we see that in the new situation, Jane, though still a bystander, whose informational status is not a part of the common ground, can successfully identify the aboutness of the token. More, though absent from the speaker's communicative plan, Jane is now in the same perceptual environment as the speaker, and she can adjust her attention according to the speaker's indications, even if she is not asked to do so.

(P'5) is called by John Perry (2001) the *reflexive truth-conditions* (of (5)). Perry defines it as not being about the referent of the singular term in the sentence, but about the utterance itself. According to his theory, content is a resource used by rational agents to classify states of affairs in terms of conditions of success, so truth-conditional content is what explains, among other things, the adequacy of beliefs to evidence. I will now explain Perry's notion of content and return once again to the analysis of (5), before I advance a few observations on demonstrative content.

## 2 PERRY'S CONCEPT OF CONTENT

Consider the example, in Perry (2001), of a man who sees the daily newspaper on his balcony one morning and acquires the belief that the newspaper is on the balcony. The content of the belief classifies the state of affairs, given some facts about the world and the information that is perceptually accessible to the agent. A neighbor who observes the situation and sees the man pick the newspaper from the floor is justified in assigning to him the belief that the newspaper is on the floor and, furthermore, to suppose that his action can be explained by the possession of such a belief.

In Perry, content is also goal-oriented. Take a variant of his original example. Suppose that the man picking the newspaper from his balcony floor that morning is named John, and he is an old acquaintance of Louie, the newspaper delivery man. John just found out that his and Louie's old friend, Joe, passed away, and he wishes to tell Louie the sad news. John has expectations about such conversation, but when he goes out to the balcony with the purpose of waiting for Louie, he sees that the newspaper was already delivered. What beliefs can we attribute to John? We can reliably say that John believes that the newspaper is on the floor. Nonetheless, given our narrative and John's goals, expectations and what is perceived by him, it is also reasonable to suppose that John has the belief that Louie has already delivered his newspaper that morning. Notice that the content of John's belief depends on what John's classificatory targets are. That is why Perry argues that the classificatory concept of content strongly depends on the *information content available* in the situation that the agent classifies.

Perry holds that his concept of content is particularly advantageous for an adequate theory of language because it accounts for how human language is used to communicate cognitive states, given that such states ultimately influence the way we act. As a matter of fact, the central claim in Perry (2001) is that there is a system

of truth-conditional contents at the theorist's disposal to explain how linguistic and information content are adjusted to one another. He points out that:

[...] the concept of 'truth-conditions of an utterance' is a *relative concept*, although it is often treated as if it were absolute. Instead of thinking in terms of the truth-conditions of an utterance, we should think of *the* truth-conditions of an utterance *given* various facts about it. And when we do this we are led to see that talking about *the* content of an utterance is an oversimplification (PERRY, 2001, p. 80).

Consequently, he heavily criticizes what he calls *the principle of the unique content*. Perry claims that more than one semantic content is generated by utterances of declarative sentences (with referential expressions). One of them is the *proposition expressed*<sup>14</sup>: one that involves a n-ary relation between a property and n individual(s),  $\langle Ix; e \rangle$ , which must, in some way, relate to the conditions that make the utterance true. But, still, why should the proposition be considered a kind of content or, better still, why has it been equated with the concept of content by an important tradition in the philosophy of language?<sup>15</sup>.

According to Perry, the main reason why the proposition is equated with the notion of content is its situational specificity and the fact that it is what typical agents *say* in typical communicative interactions. Propositions represent a high level of semantic specificity, because an interpreter only apprehends it once she loads all the spatial-temporal and intentional aspects that are relevant to semantic interpretation into truth-conditions, leaving no room for ambiguity or unfilled semantic slots. It is supposed to be the result of semantic interpretation, the content that the speaker wished to convey by performing her speech act in the first place. But, as he insists, the proposition is not the only content that is conveyed. It is given, partially, by the conventionally meaningful parts of the sentence, but more fundamentally, by the relation that the language associates with sentences, contextual factors and circumstances. He affirms: "The truth-conditions of an utterance derive directly from the meaning assigned to the sentence involved, whereas which proposition is expressed depends also on the agent, time and circumstances of utterance". (PERRY, 1997, p. 197). Perry, however, takes nonparadigmatic communicative situations as *explananda*. It is because his approach on content is, in a sense, instrumentalist at heart, allowing for multiple possibilities of interpretation, that he can account for such situations.

According to the Perryan framework, the system of contents expressed by the utterance of (5), then, will include (P<sup>r</sup>5) and (P5). In S1, however, Jane, being an eavesdropper, will apprehend (P<sup>r</sup>5), truth-conditions that are about the conventionally meaningful parts of (5) – as well as about the production of the utterance itself –, and not (P5). That will be the case because the content expressed by (5) in S1 is relative to the information content of the situation. But one important

<sup>14</sup> Though he is not exactly concerned with the ontology of propositions, he takes the classic characterization of propositions as *sharable objects of belief*, the semantic content to which we attribute truth-values.

<sup>15</sup> Of which Kaplan is an example.

thing is still left to be explained: what is the role of reflexive truth-conditions like (P<sup>r</sup>5) in explaining interpretation? Can we affirm that conventional meaning has a cognitively significant role in cases such our example or does demonstrative meaning “drops out of the picture” (NUNBERG, 1993) to give room to content?

To answer this question, let us recap some of our previous conclusions about the case of S1. Firstly, S1 was characterized as the setting of a nonparadigmatic communicative interaction in which the interpreter of the utterance of (5) is an eavesdropper, that is, an overhearer who is not acknowledge by conversational participants. I defined participants according to a common ground notion of context, based on Stalnaker’s seminal ideas about the representation of context. Next, I completed this definition with some observations about how participants contribute to conversations, using Clark & Wilkes-Gibbs idea of cycles of acceptance. Then, I set to look for a concept of content that could explain what eavesdroppers apprehend as interpreters of a natural language.

Lastly, I outlined Perry’s concept of classificatory content and his critique to the principle of unique content. According to him, one utterance expresses virtually several contents, depending on the information carried by the speech situation. In this view, then, an utterance of (5) in S1 expresses a content that is about linguistic information: about the utterance and its production. We seem thus to have found an answer to one of our first questions: what content does an eavesdropper apprehend?

Following Perry, I suggested that such content corresponded to the reflexive truth-conditions of (5), namely (P<sup>r</sup>5). In effect, what seems to be at issue in the case of S1 is to provide a distinction between the content apprehended by a conversational participant and the content apprehended by a sheer interpreter. In Jane’s case specifically, because the demonstrative in (5) is a context-dependent expression that requires either that the speaker and the interpreter are in the same perceptual environment, or that they collaborate in the same plan of referring, the information content of S1 is too scarce to allow for the determination of reference. Perry’s reflexive truth-conditions come in handy precisely to explain interpretation situations such as S1.

Nonetheless, reflexive content is about the token of a sentence and the linguistic conventions it incorporates. In the case of a deictic demonstrative, it is about the conditions of identification that work as individuating properties relatively to contexts. These conditions have the form of a linguistic rule, but they also depend on the speaker’s ability to make the putative referent salient to her audience. Both aspects have an indicative function, in the sense that they serve as pointers to individuals, given their spatial locations. The linguistic rule, however, underspecifies truth-conditions, because it does not provide a property that uniquely identifies the referent, as content is, *prima facie*, supposed to. After all, the reference of ‘that’ will always depend greatly on intentional elements, and the demonstrative’s meaning seems to “drop out of the picture” once content is determined.

My second question concerns this view on the dichotomy between demonstrative meaning and demonstrative content in what concerns cognitive significance. It seems certainly correct that meaning alone, in the case of a context-dependent and context-variant expression, such as a deictic demonstrative, underspecifies reference. Recanati (2004) presents some convincing arguments to this effect. Yet, not all cognitively significant tasks in the interpretation of a deictic demonstrative have to be executed by the final content, that is, the proposition. In determining *how* one says something in using the word ‘that’, conventional meaning leaves an informational trace that can be used by competent interpreters in reconstructing what was conveyed by the speaker in a given situation.

Remember that, in S1, the reflexive linguistic rules involved in the utterance of (5) were the only sources of information at Jane’s disposal in adjusting her belief-states to what she overhears. In the event of being asked about what was said by (5), Jane would probably recruit her classificatory practices to generate content like (P’5). Our example seems to show, then, that, when communication is somehow defective, information about the utterance may come to the rescue of informativeness in communication, allowing for the rational reconstruction of (linguistic) behavior.

Furthermore, classificatory practices play exactly this role: permitting that agents harness information following requirements of success and rationality, even in situations with informational scarcity in what concerns the determination of reference. The classificatory concept of content helps us explain these very mundane situations of information harnessing. In accepting this claim, we should keep in mind that, whenever the informational game of language is ineffectual, defective, abnormal, whatever allows speakers to play the game, will do the trick of taking on the role of content.

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