

## Demonstratives Contribute Conventional Implicatures

Word Count: 996

Compare the demonstrative phrase “that dog” with the definite description “the dog.” The demonstrative phrase has a *deictic feature*, which typically indicates a referent’s position relative to the speaker. My talk is concerned with the aspect of demonstratives’ meaning contributed by their deictic features, which I call their *deictic content*. (Likewise, I speak of the *qualitative content* of both demonstratives and definite descriptions, which is that contributed by a nounphrase complement.) With “that” the deictic content concerns distality; with “this,” proximality.

Deictic and qualitative content is similar in being *not-at-issue*: typically backgrounded relative to the main point of an utterance. One aspect of not-at-issue content can be illustrated as follows. A speaker points at (what appears to be) a dog running through the park in front of them, remarking,

- (1) That dog is so cute!

In response to (1), it is more straightforward to deny that the dog in question is cute than either that the dog is relatively distant from the speaker or that it is not a dog: consider the response “No, I disagree!” and its natural interpretation.

Given the not-at-issue status of both deictic and qualitative content, it is tempting to treat them as the same in other respects. Accordingly, since the qualitative content of both demonstrative phrases and definite descriptions is standardly taken to contribute to presuppositional content, the standard view of deictic features is that they also do so. I reject the standard view of deictic features, arguing instead for the thesis that deictic features contribute *conventional implicatures* (CIs). So, very roughly, while the standard view holds that the meaning of “that man” can be glossed as *the distal man*, I argue instead for the thesis that its meaning is better glossed as *the man...who is distal*.

My talk begins by introducing the notions of presupposition and CI, alongside providing three arguments for the thesis. It concludes by sketching a formal model of the syntax and semantics of demonstratives, in order to refine the thesis.

Here’s a classic example of presuppositional content.

- (2) Mary stopped smoking.

In (2) the proposition that Mary used to smoke is presupposed. Now, a classic example of a CI is with “but,” which can be brought out clearly in contrast to “and.”

- (3) a. Mary is poor but happy.  
b. Mary is poor and happy.

There is a bit more meaning to (3-a) than there is to (3-b), since (3-a) suggests that poverty interferes with happiness.

My first argument appeals to the property of *independence of truth values* had by CIs but not presuppositions (Potts 2005: p. 32). With (2), if Mary never smoked, then it’s neither true nor false that Mary stopped. With (3-a), in contrast, even if the editorializing about the relationship between poverty and happiness is false, the main at-issue “and” claim could still be true or false. So I consider (1) in that light. If the creature running turns out to be a large

cat, it is intuitively plausible that the token demonstrative phrase “that dog” does not pick out anything and that the sentence uttered is neither true nor false. In contrast, it does not seem that the dog in question must be relatively distant from the interlocutors in order for the main point of the utterance to be true or false. The dog might be running on the path right in front of them or across the field fairly away: either way, (1) says something true or false about the dog in question.

My second argument assumes an account of demonstratives’ presuppositional content, one recently championed by Stojnić et al. (2017), which is that it serves to restrict demonstratives’ anaphoricity, *i.e.* which discourse referent a token demonstrative picks up. So I consider data involving anaphoric demonstratives.

- (4) A woman was standing off in the distance. Another woman walked towards us.
- a. ...That/This woman was smiling.
  - b. ...#This woman was taller than that woman.

In the continuation (4-a), either demonstrative in subject position must be anaphoric to the woman discourse referent introduced by the second sentence of the setup. And the infelicity of the continuation (4-b) further evinces the fact that the more recently introduced woman discourse referent must be the one picked up by an ensuing demonstrative. On Stojnić et al.’s account, “that/this woman” picks up the most prominent woman discourse referent, so their account explains that fact. But they do not say anything about deictic features. My argument is that would be difficult to explain that fact if deictic features contributed to presuppositional content: assuming that the presuppositional content of a demonstrative determines which discourse referent it picks up, then “that woman,” glossed as *that distal woman*, should be able to pick out the woman discourse referent that is both introduced further back in discourse and which is for a woman relatively distant in the described scene.

My final argument considers the French complex demonstratives “ce(t)” and “cette.” These are not definite determiners (compare “le” and “la”), yet they do not possess deictic features. So both “That man is bald” and “This man is bald” can be translated as “Cet homme est chauve.” But the difference can be captured as follows.

- (5) a. Cet homme-là est chauve.  
b. Cet homme-ci est chauve.

These are, back to English, roughly “That man *there* est chauve” and “This man *here* is bald,” though using the clitics “-là” and “-ci” to contribute deictic content. So those constructions in French straightforwardly support my thesis, which is again, very roughly, that the meaning of “that man” should be glossed as *the man... who is distal*.

I appeal to the constructions in (5) to motivate a compositional account of demonstratives in French and English, alongside developing the background dynamic semantics account of Stojnić et al.

## References

- Potts, Christopher. 2005. *The logic of conventional implicatures*. Oxford University Press.
- Stojnić, Una, Matthew Stone & Ernie Lepore. 2017. Discourse and logical form: Pronouns, attention and coherence. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 40. 519–547.