

The Double Life of ‘The Mayor of Oakland’*

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There is a tradition in the semantics of definite descriptions, going back to Frege, that treats such phrases as denoting individuals, that is to say, items of type e . The definite determiner ‘the’ is taken to denote a partial function of type $\langle\langle e, t \rangle, e\rangle$ with the restriction that its $\langle e, t \rangle$ type argument be uniquely instantiated.¹ Compositionally, the meaning of a definite description is derived as follows:²

$$\llbracket \text{the} \rrbracket = \lambda F : \exists x(Fx) \wedge \forall x \forall y (Fx \wedge Fy \rightarrow y = x). \iota x[Fx]$$

$$\llbracket \text{greatest French soldier} \rrbracket = \lambda x[\text{gfs}(x)]$$

$$\llbracket \text{the greatest French soldier} \rrbracket = \iota x[\text{gfs}(x)]$$

There is another tradition, again going back at least to Frege, that draws a distinction between equative and predicative copular sentences. Equative sentences, such as ‘Hesperus is Phosphorus’, have the structure e -be- e , and are true just in case the e type items denoted by the pre- and postcopular expressions are identical. Predicative sentences, such as ‘Venus is a planet’, by contrast, have the structure e -be- $\langle e, t \rangle$, and are true just in case the e type item denoted by the pre-copular expression instantiates the $\langle e, t \rangle$ type item (read: property) denoted by the postcopular expression.

As it turns out, the first doctrine sits poorly with the second. If definite descriptions quite generally denote items of type e , we would expect copular sentences that contain definite descriptions in postcopular position to be uniformly equative. As Strawson (1950) already observed, however, such sentences can have

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¹For some recent defenses of the Fregean view, see e.g. Elbourne (2010), Elbourne (2005), and Heim and Kratzer (1998). The primary competitor, of course, is the quantificational analysis due to Russell (1905). On the Russellian view, ‘the’ denotes the following function of type $\langle\langle e, t \rangle, \langle\langle e, t \rangle, t\rangle\rangle$:

$$\llbracket \text{the} \rrbracket = \lambda F. \lambda G [\exists x(Fx \wedge \forall x \forall y (Fx \wedge Fy \rightarrow y = x) \wedge Gx)]$$

meaning that a definite description like ‘the greatest French soldier’ denotes something of type $\langle\langle e, t \rangle, t\rangle$ (i.e. a quantifier). Besides the type difference, the Russellian view differs from the Fregean view in that existence and uniqueness are incorporated into the truth conditions of sentences containing definite descriptions, rather than figuring as presuppositional requirements, as they do on the Fregean view. I will throughout the following work under the assumption that the e type analysis is to be preferred to the Russellian analysis for non-predicative occurrences of definite descriptions.

²I use ‘ λF ’ as shorthand for ‘ $\lambda f \in D_{\langle e, t \rangle}$ ’, ‘ λx ’ as shorthand for ‘ $\lambda x \in D_e$ ’, ‘ Fx ’ as shorthand for ‘ $f(x) = 1$ ’, and ‘ ι ’ to set off presuppositional requirements, in this case, the requirement that there exist something that instantiates the property with which the denotation of ‘the’ combines, and that there be at most one thing instantiating that property. I use ‘ ιx ’ as shorthand for ‘the unique x such that’. So e.g. ‘ $\iota x[\text{gfs}(x)]$ ’ can be read as ‘the unique x such that x is a French soldier and greater than all other French soldiers’.

a distinctly predicative character: “If I said ‘Napoleon was the greatest French soldier’, I should be using the word ‘Napoleon’ to mention a certain individual, but I should not be using the phrase, ‘the greatest French soldier,’ to mention an individual, but to say something about an individual I had already mentioned” (Strawson, 1950, p. 320). If this is right, a uniform e type analysis of definite descriptions won’t do: expressions like ‘the greatest French soldier’ must, in at least *some* cases, function to denote items of type $\langle e, t \rangle$ rather than items of type e .

In fact, Strawson’s view enjoys considerable support from a number of tests for predicativity that have been proposed in the literature on copular clauses.³ I will briefly review some of those tests in the next section, and then look at a proposal that seeks to accommodate predicative occurrences of definite descriptions under the umbrella of a Fregean e type analysis by appeal to a type-shifting principle inspired by Partee (1986).

I will then move on to discuss a semantic distinction between two kinds of definite descriptions that exhibit the structure *the + NP + of + Proper Name* — a distinction that is of considerable independent interest but has, to my knowledge, received no systematic treatment in the literature. As we will see, the members of one of these two classes of definite descriptions, the ones I call “identificational,” resist a predicative reading much in the way that certain uses of proper names do. The type-shifting proposal, I’ll argue, therefore ultimately fails on grounds of overgeneration, since it predicts that predicative readings ought to be available for such identificational definites.

I will propose that we can avoid overgenerating if, instead of appealing to unconstrained type-shifting, we countenance two definite determiners, ‘the_r’ and ‘the_p’, with ‘the_r’ having the usual $\langle \langle e, t \rangle, e \rangle$ type denotation (thus forming referring expressions), and ‘the_p’ having a $\langle \langle e, t \rangle, \langle e, t \rangle \rangle$ type denotation (thus forming predicative expressions). Given a particular view about the syntax and semantics of certain uses of proper names, this view will also correctly predict that those names fail to have a predicative reading. We will, for the bulk of what follows, be occupied with the task of motivating, articulating, and defending the two-determiner view, and the associated semantic analysis of identificational definites and proper names. The primary drawback of the view is that it requires us to countenance two semantically distinct definite determiners where we might have thought there was just one. I will close by mentioning a way in which the same results can be achieved while making do with a single definite determiner. This one-determiner proposal will appeal to an unorthodox, but I believe compelling, view that I have defended elsewhere, according to which the distinction between predicative and referential expressions involves a difference in the semantic relation such expressions bear to their semantic values.

³The view that definite descriptions occurring in postcopular position can be predicative is largely the status quo in the linguistics literature. See Mikkelsen (2008) for a helpful overview of the literature on copular clauses. In the philosophical literature, Fara (2001) has prominently argued for this view as well. Fara goes even further, defending the view that definite descriptions are always predicative in character, even in subject-position or verbal argument position (as in e.g. ‘Josephine loves the greatest French soldier’). I discuss Fara’s view in §3.

1 Three Predicativity Tests

The view that at least some definite descriptions can function predicatively in copular sentences is supported by various predicativity tests. I'll look at three of those here.

The first test involves coordination. According to it, an expression is capable of functioning predicatively in postcopular position just in case that expression can be coordinated with paradigmatically predicative expressions (such as APs) in a copular clause. The test clearly supports Strawson's claim that definite descriptions like 'the greatest French soldier' can function predicatively in copular clauses:

- (1) (a) He is clever, audacious, and [vindictive].
- (b) He is clever, audacious, and [the greatest French soldier].
- (c) * He is clever, audacious, and [Napoleon].

A second test concerns the kinds of questions different copular sentences can be used to answer. If a copular sentence involving a subject expression that denotes a human being is predicative, it can be used to answer questions introduced by the interrogative 'what'; by contrast, if such a sentence is not predicative, it cannot be used to answer questions introduced by 'what', though it may be used to answer questions introduced by 'who':⁴

- (2) (a) What is he? He is [short].
- (b) { *What/Who } is he? He is [Napoleon].

The test again yields the verdict that definite descriptions may function predicatively in postcopular position:

- (3) What is he? He is [the greatest French soldier].

As indicated, the test's applicability is limited to sentences involving subject expressions that denote human beings. Once expressions denoting non-human objects are involved, even non-predicative copular sentences can be used to answer 'what'-questions:

- (4) (a) What is that? That is Paris.
- (b) What is the capital of France? The capital of France is Paris.

A final test involves the "exceptional case marking" (ECM) verb 'consider'. This verb is able to embed so-called "small clauses" composed of the pre- and postcopular elements of paradigmatically predicative sentences, with the copula itself omitted, as in (5b) below: ⁵

- (5) (a) She considers [Joey Ramone to be cheerfully irreverent]

⁴A test of this sort is employed by Geist (2007) and Williams (1983). Higgins (1979) comments on a related phenomenon: whereas paradigmatically predicative expressions can be used in pseudo-cleft sentences like 'What Joey Ramone is is [refreshingly irreverent]', proper names like 'Jeffrey Hyman' cannot, as witnessed by the ungrammaticality of 'What Joey Ramone is is [Jeffrey Hyman]'.

⁵See e.g. Rothstein (1995).

(b) She considers [Joey Ramone cheerfully irreverent]

By contrast, in the case of copular clauses in which the second element is a paradigmatically non-predicative expression, such as a proper name, omission of the copula is marked:

(6) (a) She considers [Joey Ramone to be Jeffrey Hyman]

(b) ?? She considers [Joey Ramone Jeffrey Hyman]

We can therefore test whether an expression admits of predicative occurrence in a copular sentence by seeing whether it can function as the second element of a small clause embedded under ‘consider’. Clearly, we get a positive verdict for the definite description ‘the greatest French soldier’:

(7) She considers [Napoleon the greatest French soldier].

thus again lending support to Strawson’s conjecture.⁶

2 A Type-Shifting Proposal

The fact that definite descriptions are able to function predicatively poses a difficulty for the e type analysis. Equative and predicative copular sentences are interpreted according to the following principles:⁷

Equative: if $\llbracket \alpha \rrbracket \in D_e$ and $\llbracket \beta \rrbracket \in D_e$, then $\llbracket \alpha \text{ is } \beta \rrbracket = 1$ iff $\llbracket \alpha \rrbracket = \llbracket \beta \rrbracket$

Predicative: if $\llbracket \alpha \rrbracket \in D_e$ and $\llbracket \beta \rrbracket \in D_{\langle e,t \rangle}$, then $\llbracket \alpha \text{ is } \beta \rrbracket = 1$ iff $\llbracket \beta \rrbracket(\llbracket \alpha \rrbracket) = 1$.

The view that definite descriptions uniformly denote items of type e thus incorrectly predicts that copular sentences with definite descriptions in postcopular position are uniformly equative, and incapable of receiving a predicative interpretation. How, then, might we amend the e type analysis so as to make it compatible with the data just reviewed?

⁶This third test arguably furnishes weaker evidence than our other two tests. As Laserson (2009) observes, the verb ‘consider’ normally “does not combine with clauses expressing completely objective matters of fact,” but rather with clauses that “involve some sort of evaluative judgment or decision on the part of anyone assessing them for truth.” ‘John considers Bill six feet, two inches tall’ sounds marked, for example. Our judgments might therefore reflect less on the predicativity of the embedded clause than on the degree of objectivity involved in the matter under discussion. Both (5) and (7) involve a degree of subjectivity: I might agree that Joey Ramone is irreverent, but not find his irreverence particularly cheerful, or again, I might agree that Napoleon is a French soldier, but feel that is in the end Joan of Arc who is greater. By contrast, whether Joey Ramone is Jeffrey Hyman is a considerably more objective matter. The contrast in the acceptability of embedding the clause with, as opposed to without, the copula serves to mitigate this worry to some extent, but I admit that our judgments here are less robust than one would ideally like. Thanks to John MacFarlane for raising this concern to me.

⁷We needn’t take these principles to be primitive. We might, for example, take it that ‘be’ is ambiguous, so that we have a (semantically vacuous) “‘be’ of predication”, as well as a “‘be’ of identity” that functions to denote the identity relation $\lambda x.\lambda y[x = y]$. The principles above then emerge as consequences of this deeper analysis. For an overview of various approaches to the semantics of ‘be’, see Mikkelsen (2008). For present purposes, any story will do, so long as it is compatible with the principles above. I also don’t mean to suggest that there may not be structural differences between equative and predicative sentences in addition to the semantic differences here highlighted. See e.g. Bowers (1993) and Heycock and Kroch (1999) for two different proposals about the syntax of equative and predicative sentences.

One promising proposal is to appeal to a type-shifting principle that, given any expression having an e type denotation, generates a homonymous expression denoting something of type $\langle e, t \rangle$. We could formulate such a principle by appealing to the (total) function *ident* proposed by Partee (1986), which maps e type items to corresponding $\langle e, t \rangle$ type items:

$$ident = \lambda x. \lambda y [y = x]$$

Given an e type item x , *ident* yields the property of being identical to that x :

$$ident(x) = \lambda y [y = x]$$

The type-shifting principle is then as follows:

Ident Type-Shifting: For any expression α_1 such that $\llbracket \alpha_1 \rrbracket \in D_e$, there is an expression α_2 such that $\llbracket \alpha_2 \rrbracket \in D_{\langle e, t \rangle} = ident(\llbracket \alpha_1 \rrbracket) = \lambda y [y = \llbracket \alpha_1 \rrbracket]$.

Thus, given that our semantics yields $\iota x [gfs(x)]$ as the e type semantic value of ‘[the greatest French soldier]₁’, we get the following denotation for predicative occurrences of this description:

$$\llbracket [the\ greatest\ French\ soldier]_2 \rrbracket = \lambda y [y = \iota x [gfs(x)]]$$

We then get the desired result that ‘Napoleon is the greatest French soldier’ can be interpreted predicatively as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \llbracket [Napoleon\ is\ [the\ greatest\ French\ soldier]_2] \rrbracket &= 1 \\ \text{iff } \llbracket [the\ greatest\ French\ soldier]_2 \rrbracket (\llbracket [Napoleon] \rrbracket) &= 1 \\ \text{iff } \lambda y [y = \iota x [gfs(x)]] (\llbracket [Napoleon] \rrbracket) &= 1 \\ \text{iff } \llbracket [Napoleon] \rrbracket &= \iota x [gfs(x)] \end{aligned}$$

Notice that since the definite description ‘[the greatest French soldier]₁’ receives an e type denotation, the proposal predicts that ‘Napoleon is the greatest French soldier’ should have not just a predicative reading, but should also be subject to an equative interpretation along the following lines:

$$\begin{aligned} \llbracket [Napoleon\ is\ [the\ greatest\ French\ soldier]_1] \rrbracket &= 1 \\ \text{iff } \llbracket [Napoleon] \rrbracket &= \llbracket [the\ greatest\ French\ soldier]_1 \rrbracket \\ \text{iff } \llbracket [Napoleon] \rrbracket &= \iota x [gfs(x)] \end{aligned} \text{ }^8$$

This prediction is not in conflict with the results of our predicativity tests. What those tests show is that copular sentences with definite descriptions like ‘the greatest French soldier’ in postcopular position are *capable* of receiving a predicative reading. But this leaves it quite open that such sentences may *also* have an equative reading in addition to their predicative reading. In fact, our second, interrogative-based test lends support to the prediction. For while copular clauses with definite descriptions in postcopular position can, as we saw, function as answers to questions introduced by ‘what’, suggesting that they have a predicative reading, it can’t be denied that they are *also* acceptable as answers to questions introduced by ‘who’:

⁸Note that the truth conditions of the equative reading of our copular sentence are the same as those of its predicative reading — the difference between them lies in the way those truth conditions are derived. I return to this feature of the proposal below.

- (8) (a) What is he? He is [the greatest French soldier].
 (b) Who is he? He is [the greatest French soldier].

suggesting that such sentences have an equative reading as well, just as the type-shifting proposal predicts.⁹

3 Overgeneration

The trouble with the type-shifting proposal isn't that it predicts equative readings for copular sentences with definite descriptions in postcopular position, but that it predicts predicative readings for copular sentences which, according to our tests, have only an equative reading. We saw that intuitively equative sentences like 'He is Napoleon', though capable of answering questions introduced by 'who', cannot be used to respond to questions introduced by 'what', and do not readily embed as small clauses under 'consider'. Furthermore, attempts to coordinate proper names like 'Napoleon' with paradigmatically predicative expressions — as in e.g. 'He is clever, audacious, and Napoleon' — fail miserably. These data suggest that copular sentences containing proper names in postcopular position are incapable of being interpreted predicatively.

And yet the type-shifting proposal offers no explanation of why this should be so. Quite the contrary: it appears to predict that sentences like 'He is Napoleon' *should* have a predicative reading. After all, *ident* yields an $\langle e, t \rangle$ type item given any e type argument, so our principle of Ident Type-Shifting ought to apply to any e type expression to yield a homonymous $\langle e, t \rangle$ type expression. We would, in other words, expect to be able to apply Ident Type-Shifting to 'Napoleon₁' to yield the homonym 'Napoleon₂', with the latter denoting the $\langle e, t \rangle$ type item $\lambda y[y = \text{Napoleon}]$, giving us the predicative copular sentence 'He is Napoleon₂'.

One might try to rescue the type-shifting proposal by holding that although there is no *semantic* restriction that prohibits Ident Type-Shifting from applying to 'Napoleon₁', the principle can be reformulated to incorporate a *syntactic* restriction that only allows its application to phrases that are syntactically DPs (determiner phrases). There are several difficulties with this attempted rescue, however. First, proper names are often classified as DPs themselves¹⁰, meaning that the imagined syntactic restriction would have to apply specifically to phrases headed by a *definite* determiner. Second, there is evidence to suggest that proper names are themselves preceded by a silent definite determiner.¹¹ Though the determiner is silent in English, it is spelled out in e.g. certain dialects of German (the various dialects of Swiss German, for example) with names of people:¹²

- (9) Der Oscar spielt seine Trommel.
 "Oscar plays his drum."

⁹Geist (2007), for example, draws this conclusion on the basis of the interrogative-based test, arguing that "depending on the interpretation of the DP ... the copular sentence has a predicational or an equative reading."

¹⁰See e.g. Heim and Kratzer (1998) and Adger (2003).

¹¹See e.g. Matushansky (2006). For a sustained defense of the view that *all* intuitively referential expressions (including not just proper names but even pronouns) are in fact definite descriptions, see Elbourne (2005).

¹²Other languages in which a definite article is required with at least certain proper names include European Portuguese, certain dialects of Italian and Spanish, colloquial Icelandic, Northern Norwegian, Northern Swedish, Catalan, Tagalog, Pima, Albanian, and Modern Greek. See Matushansky (2006) and references therein. I will focus on examples from Swiss German (though using standard German orthography).

Finally, as we'll see in the next section, there is a well-demarcated class of overt definite descriptions that patterns with proper names in resisting a predicative reading. Syntactically restricting our principle of Ident Type-Shifting to phrases involving a definite determiner therefore won't prevent overgeneration.

Before moving on to investigate these non-predicative definite description, however, let me briefly say something about why these considerations also spell trouble for an alternative approach to predicative definite descriptions due to Fara (2001). Fara directs her arguments against the Russellian analysis of definite descriptions, pointing out that such an analysis is ill-placed to account for definite descriptions that function predicatively. She doesn't consider the possibility of appealing to a type-shifting principle (in combination with either a Fregean or Russellian analysis), and instead concludes that definite descriptions quite *generally* function as predicates, even when they occur in subject position or as arguments to relational verbs.¹³ Such a move faces a considerable difficulties, however, paralleling those that beset the unconstrained type-shifting view. Again: if proper names are in fact covert definite descriptions, then Fara's view falsely predicts that copular clauses with proper names in postcopular position should have a predicative reading; and even if proper names don't involve a covert definite determiner, the view still leaves us unable to account of the fact that certain overtly definite descriptions — of the sort considered in the next section — behave like proper names in resisting a predicative reading. We therefore cannot accept a view like Fara's according to which definite descriptions are uniformly predicative, any more than we can accept an unconstrained type-shifting principle that generates an $\langle e, t \rangle$ type expression from any e type expression.

4 Non-Predicative Definite Descriptions

Compare the definite descriptions 'the Mayor of Oakland' and 'the City of Oakland'. Superficially, these two phrases look strikingly similar, both having the structure *the + NP + of + Proper Name*. But they differ semantically, in two related respects.

First, whereas 'the Mayor of Oakland' has a genitive, or possessive, character, being roughly synonymous with 'Oakland's Mayor', 'the City of Oakland' does not, since it isn't synonymous with 'Oakland's City'. This contrast also emerges, as one might expect, in a difference in the way that the relevant noun and proper name interact with the verbs 'have' and 'be': Oakland *has* a mayor, but it *is* a city.¹⁴

This contrast between the possessive character of 'the Mayor of Oakland' and the non-possessive character of 'the City of Oakland' seems to be grounded in a second contrast, having to do with the semantics of the relevant noun phrase. Whereas 'City' as it occurs in 'the City of Oakland' seems to function as a sortal

¹³Fara briefly addresses the type-shifting view in Fara (2006), but rejects it on grounds of theoretical economy. Her argument, in brief, is that certain sentences containing definite descriptions display a kind of quantificational variability, and that we can account for this by holding that descriptions function as predicates that serve to restrict the relevant quantifiers. She then concludes that since definite descriptions must be regarded as functioning predicatively at least some of the time, we have reason to allow them to "uniformly take a type $\langle e, t \rangle$ interpretation" and "no good reason to adopt type-shifting" (Fara, 2006). My claim is that the data furnished by our predicativity tests give us good reason to reject views that — like both Fara's and the unconstrained type-shifting view — allow definite descriptions to *uniformly* take on an $\langle e, t \rangle$ type interpretation.

¹⁴Other examples of possessive definites include e.g. 'the author of *Waverly*', 'the father of Annette', 'the capital of California', 'the CEO of Dunder Mifflin', 'the Duke of Cornwall', and 'the location of Capone's treasure'. Other examples of non-possessive definites of the kind we're here interested in include 'the month of April', 'the sin of Pride', 'the county of Alameda', and 'the state of California'.

noun, the noun ‘Mayor’ as it occurs in ‘the Mayor of Oakland’ functions as what is often called a relational or, indeed, functional noun.¹⁵ ‘Mayor’ is functional in the sense that it denotes a functional relation — one that holds between a city and the unique person who is mayorally employed by that city.¹⁶ The definite description ‘the Mayor of Oakland’ as a whole thus denotes (at least in non-predicative uses) whoever is the mayor of the object named by the proper name occurring after the ‘of’. By contrast, ‘the City of Oakland’ denotes the very same item that is denoted by the proper name occurring after the ‘of’, and simply adds the information that this item happens to be a city. Intuitively, possessive definite descriptions like ‘the Mayor of Oakland’ indicate a role without directly identifying who or what it is that plays the relevant role. Non-possessive definites like ‘the City of Oakland’, by contrast, directly identify the unique satisfier of the descriptive material (Oakland, in this case). I’ll therefore call definites of the latter sort “identificational”.¹⁷

What is of interest for present purposes is that possessive definites like ‘the Mayor of Oakland’ are, like ‘the greatest French soldier’, capable of functioning predicatively in copular sentences:

- (10) (a) She is ambitious, driven, and the Mayor of Oakland.
 (b) What is she? She’s the Mayor of Oakland.
 (c) I consider Alice the Mayor of Oakland.

Identificational definites like ‘the City of Oakland’, by contrast, resist a predicative reading, much in the way that proper names do:

- (11) (a) ? I consider [that the City of Oakland]
 (b) * It is lively, energetic, and the City of Oakland.

We cannot apply our interrogative-based test in this case, since ‘the City of Oakland’ denotes an non-human object. In fact, there don’t appear to be any examples of paradigmatically identificational definites that denote human beings (see n14).

We can find relevant examples if we slightly widen our net, however. The description ‘the philosopher Frege’, for example, would seem to be an identificational definite that denotes a human being. It meets both of the criteria mentioned above. First, it clearly fails to be possessive, since Frege doesn’t *have* a philosopher but rather *is* one. And second, the description as a whole denotes the very same item named by the proper

¹⁵Compare Löbner (1985). Löbner offers the pair ‘wife’ and ‘woman’ as an illustration: ‘woman’ is “just a one place predicate” whereas ‘wife’ is “a relational concept ... A wife is always the wife *of* someone.”

¹⁶Calling such nouns ‘functional’ is apt to mislead, because it may carry the suggestion that functional nouns literally denote functions from objects (e.g. cities) to other objects (e.g. the mayors of those cities), that is, functions of type $\langle e, e \rangle$. What is meant, rather, is that ‘Mayor’ denotes a function of type $\langle e, \langle e, t \rangle \rangle$, i.e. a function that maps cities to properties that are uniquely satisfied by the mayors of those cities. Early discussions of possessive definites tend to encourage the confusion by parsing things like ‘the Mayor of Oakland’ as the completion of a functor, ‘the Mayor of’, by a proper name, ‘Oakland’. See e.g. Davidson (1967) on ‘the father of Annette’ and Frege (1997) on ‘the capital of Sweden’.

¹⁷This distinction between possessive and identificational definites has, to my knowledge, not been discussed in any detail in the literature. One precedent is Teichmann (1989)’s distinction between descriptions that are “directly about” something and those that are “indirectly about” something; he offers the pair ‘the property which enables one to see’ and ‘the property of having two eyes’ as examples, the latter being directly about the same property that the former is indirectly about. I myself was lead to reflect on the distinction by thinking about “identificational” property descriptions like ‘the property of being happy’. I discuss some of this background in §9 of the present paper.

name ‘Frege’.¹⁸ In this case we do not have the ‘of’ that we find in paradigm identificational definites like ‘the City of Oakland’ or ‘the Month of April’, but the need for the ‘of’ isn’t universal. In German, for example, the ‘of’ is absent in both paradigm identificational definites and descriptions like ‘the philosopher Frege’, suggesting that they form a natural class:

- (12) (a) Die Stadt Oakland
 “The City of Oakland”
 (b) Der Monat April
 “The month of April”
 (c) Der Philosoph Frege
 “The philosopher Frege”

The fact that certain identificational definites lack an ‘of’ isn’t really surprising from a semantic point of view. In the case of possessive definites, the relevant NP is a relational noun, and the ‘of’ seems to have the function of marking the argument position of that noun. In the case of identificational definites, by contrast, the NP is sortal — since the ‘of’ does not serve to mark out an argument position, it is rather to be expected that it can be left out in certain cases in English, and that other languages do not include it at all.¹⁹

If we now apply our interrogative-based test to ‘the philosopher Frege’, we do indeed get the result that it cannot function predicatively in copular sentences (in either Swiss German or English):

- (13) (a) Wer ist er? Er ist der Philosoph Frege.
 Who is he? He is the Philosopher Frege.
 (b) *Was ist er? Er is der Philosoph Frege.
 * What is he? He is the philosopher Frege.

thus again suggesting that identificational definites, in contrast to possessive definites, do not have a predicative reading.

We therefore have to conclude that the type-shifting proposal does indeed fail. Semantically, *ident* can combine with any item of type *e*, meaning that we would expect the principle of Ident Type-Shifting to apply to any *e* type expression, thus falsely predicting that all copular sentences have a predicative reading. If we were to incorporate a syntactic restriction that only allows us to apply the principle to definite descriptions, it still overgenerates: granted an analysis of proper names on which they involve a covert definite determiner, it falsely predicts that names ought to be capable of occurring predicatively in copular sentences, and even

¹⁸Other ‘of’-free identificational definites include e.g. ‘the number nine’, ‘the author Sir Walter Scott’, ‘the planet Venus’, ‘the psychiatric patient Herbert Georg Beutler’ etc. See Jackendoff (1984) for a very illuminating discussion of such ‘of’-free identificational definites.

¹⁹Of course, this still leaves the question of why, on the one hand, ‘the City of Oakland’ is preferred to ‘the City Oakland’, and why, on the other hand, ‘the philosopher Frege’ cannot be rendered as ‘the philosopher of Frege’ (at least not while maintaining an identificational reading). I have no explanation of this fact. But if I had to hazard a guess, I would say that the ‘of’ in ‘the City of Oakland’ serves a prosodic function, perhaps making it clear that the description is not to be understood appositively. See §8 for more on apposition.

absent that analysis of names, it falsely predicts that identificational definites ought to be capable of functioning predicatively in copular sentences. (As already noted, similar difficulties beset views like the one defended by Fara (2001), according to which definite descriptions *uniformly* function as predicates.) We therefore need a different way to accommodate predicative definite descriptions.

5 A Different Proposal: Two Definite Determiners

An acceptable treatment of predicative definite descriptions must meet two desiderata. First, it must allow for the fact, pointed out by Strawson (1950), that certain definite descriptions, like ‘the greatest French soldier’ and ‘the Mayor of Oakland’, are capable of functioning predicatively in copular sentences. Second, it must account for the fact that copular sentences containing proper names and identificational definites in postcopular position have an equative, but no predicative, reading. An acceptable solution should, in other words, predict that ‘the greatest French soldier’ and ‘the Mayor of Oakland’ can take on $\langle e, t \rangle$ type semantic values in addition to their usual e type semantic values, while also predicting that proper names and identificational definites receive only e type semantic values, thus uniformly generating equative sentences.

The type-shifting proposal meets the first desideratum at the expense of the second. One way to achieve both desiderata, I want to suggest, is by appealing to two definite determiners. One determiner, ‘the_r’, yields referring expressions (hence the subscripted ‘r’) — it combines with an expression that denotes something of type $\langle e, t \rangle$ to yield an expression that denotes something of type e . The second determiner, ‘the_p’, yields predicative expressions (hence the subscripted ‘p’) — it combines with an expression that denotes something of type $\langle e, t \rangle$ to yield an expression that denotes something of type $\langle e, t \rangle$.

Let me put off discussion of how exactly an appeal to two-determiners will allow us to meet our second desideratum until the next section, and begin by inquiring into the semantics of our two determiners on a more general level. At a first pass, we might take it that they have the following denotations:

$$\llbracket \text{the}_r \rrbracket = \lambda F : \exists x(Fx) \wedge \forall x \forall y (Fx \wedge Fy \rightarrow y = x). \iota x[Fx]$$

$$\llbracket \text{the}_p \rrbracket = \lambda F : \exists x(Fx) \wedge \forall x \forall y (Fx \wedge Fy \rightarrow y = x). \lambda y[y = \iota x[Fx]]$$

This proposal resembles the type-shifting proposal, in that it assigns the same denotation to e.g. [the_p greatest French soldier] that the type-shifting proposal assigns to [the greatest French soldier]₂ — namely $\lambda y[y = \iota x[\text{gfs}(x)]]$.

There is, however, a certain awkwardness to this resemblance.²⁰ After all, a distinguishing feature of the *ident* function is that it can be used to formulate a type-shifting principle that generates an $\langle e, t \rangle$ type expression given any e type expression. But we are here precisely trying to avoid such uniformity in the generation of $\langle e, t \rangle$ type expressions from e type expressions. So it’s somewhat unexpected that we should assign ‘the_p’ a denotation that implicitly invokes *ident*.²¹ Second, if ‘the_p greatest French soldier’ denotes the property $\lambda y[y = \iota x[\text{gfs}(x)]]$, then equative and predicative readings of ‘Napoleon is the greatest French

²⁰Thanks to Melissa Fusco for drawing my attention to some of the worries I here discuss.

²¹“Implicitly” in the sense that the denotation here contemplated for the_p can be specified using the *ident* function: $\llbracket \text{the}_p \rrbracket = \lambda F : \exists x(Fx) \wedge \forall x \forall y (Fx \wedge Fy \rightarrow y = x). \text{ident}(\iota x[Fx])$.

soldier’ receive truth conditions that are, as we saw above, though generated differently, in the end the same. But if we are going to take the distinction between equative and predicative copular sentences seriously — and as we’ve seen, there is evidence that we should — then we might want this difference reflected more deeply in our semantics: predicative sentences involving postcopular definite descriptions shouldn’t involve the very relation (viz. identity) that characterizes equative sentences.

Third, the proposed semantics for ‘the_p’ has the consequence that the predicate ‘the_p greatest French soldier’ presupposes the existence of something that satisfies it. This presuppositional requirement is explicit in the semantic value assigned to ‘the_p’ above, and is of course required if we are going to be able to use $\iota x[\text{gfs}(x)]$ in our metalanguage to specify the property $\lambda y[y = \iota x[\text{gfs}(x)]]$ as the semantic value of ‘the_p greatest French soldier’. Again, however, there is a certain awkwardness to this consequence. Intuitively, a distinguishing feature of predicates is that they do not presuppose the existence of a satisfier, i.e. that predicates generally leave it open that they may be unsatisfied (or even unsatisfiable).²²

In fact, an argument that supports this worry emerges from an observation due to Fara (2001). She notes that the negated predicative copular sentence

(14) Aristotle wasn’t a philosopher.

which contains an *indefinite* description in postcopular position does not entail “the existence of a philosopher, or, for that matter, any person other than Aristotle” (Fara, 2001, p. 12). She then claims that a negated copular sentences containing a *definite* description in postcopular position, such as

(15) Napoleon isn’t the greatest French soldier.

similarly do not entail the existence of someone who satisfies the descriptive material.²³ If we accept that copular sentences containing definite descriptions in postcopular position have an equative reading, we cannot entirely follow Fara in this regard, since equative sentences do have the relevant existence entailment. ‘Hesperus isn’t Phosphorus’, for example, does entail that there is something other than Hesperus that *is* Phosphorus.

Nevertheless, it strikes me as plausible that (15) does have at least one reading on which it doesn’t entail the existence of a French soldier greater than all other French soldiers. The following, for example, seems to permit of a reading on which it is not contradictory or self-undermining:

²²Compare Larson and Segal (1995)’s claim that “predicates are associated with *general conditions of satisfaction*: conditions that are indifferent to the number of individuals that meet them” (p. 127). I wouldn’t want to join them in their view that predicative expressions are quite generally indifferent to the number of things that satisfy them, since the superlative $\langle e, t \rangle$ complement of the definite article in ‘the greatest French soldier’, for instance, requires that it be satisfied by at most one thing. (Interestingly, their own treatment of predicative definite descriptions belies their proposed “generality condition”, as well as the weaker constraint I accept.) I prefer to put the point by saying that the condition associated with a predicate should be indifferent as to whether there exists something that meets it. Even this weaker claim requires some qualification: if we accept the $\langle e, t \rangle$ type semantics for bare (or determiner-less) proper names proposed in §7 below, occurrences of bare proper names require the existence of something satisfying the name, so to speak. We can still hold that expressions which actually function as predicates in copular sentences don’t presuppose the existence of a satisfier, however.

²³Her own example is ‘Max isn’t the owner’ (in the context of discussing the ownership, or lack thereof, of an apparently abandoned old Nova), which involves an incomplete definite description. I will throughout confine my attention to “complete” descriptions like ‘the greatest French soldier’ and ‘the Mayor of Oakland’.

(16) Napoleon isn't the greatest French soldier. In fact, France has no soldiers.

The proposal currently on the table won't let us accommodate such a reading, however, since it incorporates an existence presupposition for predicative definite descriptions. We thus add a third desideratum in addition to the two cited earlier: our account should have as its consequence that predicative definite descriptions (like other, more run-of-the-mill predicates) do not presuppose the existence of something that satisfies them.²⁴

We can meet this third desideratum if we assign our two determiners the following denotations:

$$\llbracket \text{the}_r \rrbracket = \lambda F : \exists x(Fx) \wedge \forall x \forall y (Fx \wedge Fy \rightarrow y = x). \iota x[Fx]$$

$$\llbracket \text{the}_p \rrbracket = \lambda F : \forall x \forall y (Fx \wedge Fy \rightarrow y = x). \lambda y[Fy]$$

Our determiner 'the_p' then differs from the standard Fregean determiner 'the_r' in two respects. First, we of course again have a difference in semantic type: whereas 'the_r' is of type $\langle\langle e, t \rangle, e\rangle$, 'the_p' is of type $\langle\langle e, t \rangle, \langle e, t \rangle\rangle$. Second, there is a presuppositional difference: whereas the denotation of 'the_r' requires of the property with which it combines that there be at most one thing that instantiates it *and* that there exist something that instantiates it, the denotation of 'the_p' does not incorporate the existence requirement. It is this second feature which allows us to accommodate a reading of 'Napoleon isn't the greatest French soldier' on which it doesn't presuppose the existence of a French soldier greater than all others. The denotation of 'the_p' essentially just runs a check on the property with which it combines, ensuring that uniqueness is satisfied. A predicative definite description $\ulcorner \text{the}_p \alpha \urcorner$ thus has the same denotation as the predicate α with which it combines; it differs only in introducing a uniqueness presupposition that is absent from the bare α .

6 Identificational Properties

The proposal as it currently stands meets our first and third desiderata: it lets us accommodate the fact that definite descriptions can function as predicates, and it does not have the consequence that predicative definite descriptions presuppose the existence of a satisfier. Let us now turn to the question of how the two-determiner proposal will let us meet our second desideratum.

I noted earlier that the description 'the Mayor of Oakland' as a whole denotes (in non-predicative uses) the mayor of the object named by the proper name occurring after the 'of', while 'the City of Oakland' denotes the very same item as is named by the proper name occurring after the 'of'. We can capture this fact if we hold that the properties denoted by the predicates with which the definite article combines in these two cases are as follows:²⁵

$$\llbracket \text{Mayor of Oakland} \rrbracket = \lambda x[M(o)(x)]$$

$$\llbracket \text{City of Oakland} \rrbracket = \lambda x[Cx \wedge x = o]$$

²⁴The Ident Type-Shifting proposal considered earlier of course doesn't meet this third desideratum either. We may therefore take the present considerations to give us further reason to look for an alternative way to accommodate predicative definites.

²⁵See §7 for further motivation for, and discussion of the compositional derivation of, these semantic values.

The property denoted by ‘City of Oakland’ thus involves an identity requirement, in particular, the requirement that anything instantiating the property be identical to the object named by the proper name that occurs after ‘of’ (that is, be identical to Oakland). The property denoted by ‘Mayor of Oakland’, by contrast, incorporates no such identity requirement, since the thing instantiating this property (if such there be) need not be identical to the object named by the proper name that occurs after the ‘of’, but rather needs to be the Mayor of that object.

This suggests that the reason identificational definites cannot function as predicates is that the determiner ‘the_p’ incorporates an extra presuppositional requirement absent from ‘the_r’. In particular, ‘the_p’ not only requires that the predicate with which it combines denote a property that is instantiated by at most one object, but also that that property not be identificational. Its denotation, in other words, is:

$$\llbracket \text{the}_p \rrbracket = \lambda F : \neg \text{Id}(F) \wedge \forall x \forall y (Fx \wedge Fy \rightarrow y = x). \lambda y [Fy]$$

In view of the fact that, on our proposal, an expression of the form $\ulcorner \text{the}_p \alpha \urcorner$ has the same denotation as α , it is, in a way, not surprising that ‘the_p’ should resist combining with α if the latter denotes an identificational property. For if there were predicative copular sentences that contain a postcopular expression that denotes an identificational property, then the truth conditions of such sentences would again be, at least partially, equative in character.

Consider again our earlier example of ‘the philosopher Frege’, for instance. We may take it that the predicate with which the definite article here combines denotes the following property:

$$\llbracket \text{philosopher Frege} \rrbracket = \lambda x [Px \wedge x = f]$$

If ‘the_p philosopher Frege’ were an admissible description, the truth conditions of the *predicative* copular sentence ‘Gottlob is the_p philosopher Frege’ would, in part, require that the relation of identity hold between the object named by ‘Gottlob’ and that named by ‘Frege’. But truth conditions involving the relation of identity are precisely what characterize *equative* sentences. It is thus not particularly surprising that the sentence ‘Gottlob is the philosopher Frege’ should be capable of being interpreted equatively — that is, capable of being read as ‘Gottlob is the_r philosopher Frege’ — but not predicatively.

What exactly is it for a property to be identificational? That is: what is the check that the function denoted by ‘the_p’ runs on the property F in determining whether $\text{Id}(F)$? I am inclined to think that the notion of being an identificational property can be taken as a primitive. As noted earlier, we seem, as speakers, to have a fairly firm grasp on the difference between identificational and non-identificational definites, and we might take this to show that we have a similarly firm grasp of what it is for a property to be identificational, or what it is for a predicate to denote an identificational property. Our semantics can therefore appeal to speakers’ competence in determining whether a property is such as to incorporate the requirement that anything instantiating it be identical to a certain individual.²⁶

²⁶Admittedly, some care needs to be taken here. Consider the nested possessive definite ‘the (immediate) successor of the (immediate) predecessor of two’. This description includes a name of the very thing that the description as a whole denotes, just like ‘the number two’ does. But the former, unlike the latter, is nevertheless not identificational. Intuitively, there is an element of indirection involved in the former case that is absent from the latter. The indirection, I suggest, has to do with the absence of an identity requirement. Thanks to Mike Martin for the example.

If a more formal explication is wanted, the notion is, I believe, best spelled out in modal terms. The notion of a rigid designator is familiar: an e type expression is rigid if it denotes the same object relative to every possible world in which that object exists (and doesn't denote anything relative to worlds in which that object fails to exist). Now the (referential) definite description 'the_r philosopher Frege' is not quite rigid, because it will fail to denote Frege (in fact, it will fail to denote at all) relative to possible worlds in which Frege exists but isn't a philosopher. Nevertheless, there is a closely related property — call it quasi-rigidity — that 'the philosopher Frege' does have: relative to any world at which 'the philosopher Frege' denotes something at all, it denotes the same thing, namely Frege. (So rigid designators are also quasi-rigid, but not vice versa.) This notion of quasi-rigidity can be extended to predicates that can be satisfied by at most one thing: let's say that such a predicate is quasi-rigid if it has the same singleton extension relative to every possible world at which it has a nonempty extension.²⁷ Predicates like 'philosopher Frege' or 'City of Oakland' that denote identificational properties are then quasi-rigid: relative to every possible world in which 'City of Oakland' has a nonempty extension, its extension is the same singleton set, viz. {Oakland}. Similarly, we might say that a property is identificational just in case it is instantiated by the same object in every possible world in which it is instantiated at all. We might, in other words, say that $\text{Id}(F)$ just in case $\exists x \Box \forall y (Fy \rightarrow y = x)$. Or to put it differently: the $\langle e, t \rangle$ type expression $\ulcorner \text{the}_p \alpha \urcorner$ is admissible only if $\neg \text{Id}(\llbracket \alpha \rrbracket)$, that is, only if the corresponding e type expression $\ulcorner \text{the}_r \alpha \urcorner$ fails to be quasi-rigid (and thus also fails to be rigid).²⁸

As is so often the case with modal characterizations, however, there is also a certain difficulty with the proposed explication. Take 'the positive square root of nine'. This description is quasi-rigid, and our modal proposal would classify the property denoted by 'positive square root of nine' as identificational. And yet the description is possessive, and is as such capable of functioning predicatively. We could perhaps try to get around this by taking the modality involved to be epistemic, rather than metaphysical, in character. Suppose I haven't yet done the math to figure out what the positive square root of nine is; I could then say that although three might be the positive square root of nine, it might also not be. As I've said, however, it isn't clear to me that we ultimately *need* a "deeper" explication of what it is for a property to be identificational, but can just rely on our intuitive grasp of the notion.

²⁷I am not claiming that this is how *rigidity* ought to be understood in relation to predicates. For one, our notion of quasi-rigidity only applies to predicates that are satisfied by at most one thing. We could extend the notion to multiply satisfiable predicates by saying that a predicate is quasi-rigid just in case it has the same extension relative to every world at which it has a nonempty extension. Soames (2002) considers such a definition of rigidity as applied to predicates, but rejects it on the grounds that it classifies natural-kind predicates like 'animal' as non-rigid. See Soames (2002) for a detailed discussion of how rigidity might to be understood as applied to predicates.

²⁸Compare Comorovski (2007), who argues that only non-rigid definite descriptions can occur in the subject position of specificational clauses. Mikkelsen (2004) argues that the subject of a specificational clause is a predicate. If we combine the proposals, we get a view of specificational clauses much like the one I'm putting forward for predicative copular clauses: a definite description may occur in the subject position of a specificational clause — that is, following Mikkelsen (2004), may function predicatively — only if the corresponding e type description fails to be rigid (or rather: fails to be quasi-rigid).

7 Proper Names

I have so far only discussed the two-determiner proposal as it applies to definite descriptions. As we saw earlier, however, proper names resist a predicative reading just as much as identificational definites do. The two-determiner proposal will accommodate this data given a certain view about the syntax and semantics of proper names.

To begin, consider again the identificational definite ‘the philosopher Frege’. What semantic function is the name ‘Frege’ playing here? Names are traditionally thought of as paradigms of e type expressions. But if ‘Frege’ is of type e , then since the sortal predicate ‘philosopher’ is an $\langle e, t \rangle$ type expression, the constituent ‘philosopher Frege’ is predicted to be of type t . As such, it would then be incapable of combining with the definite article, since ‘the’ requires a complement of type $\langle e, t \rangle$.

Evidently, we need to assign ‘Frege’ a type which will allow it to combine with ‘philosopher’ to produce an $\langle e, t \rangle$ type expression. There would appear to be two options here. One option would be to treat ‘Frege’ as an $\langle e, t \rangle$ type expression, and to then generate type $\langle e, t \rangle$ for ‘philosopher Frege’ via an application of the rule of Predicate Modification proposed by Heim and Kratzer (1998). A second option would be to treat ‘Frege’ as having type $\langle \langle e, t \rangle, \langle e, t \rangle \rangle$, and to then generate type $\langle e, t \rangle$ for ‘philosopher Frege’ via Functional Application. There are reasons to prefer the first of these two options, however. For as we have already had occasion to note, in many languages even unmodified proper names are accompanied by a definite article. This data is unproblematic if proper names denote items of type $\langle e, t \rangle$, but remains unexplained on the second view, according to which proper names have type $\langle \langle e, t \rangle, \langle e, t \rangle \rangle$.

I therefore propose that we treat “bare” proper names as having type $\langle e, t \rangle$. In particular, I suggest that ‘Frege’ denotes the following (minimal) identificational property:

$$\llbracket \text{Frege} \rrbracket = \lambda x[x = f]$$

This view is implicit in the denotations I proposed earlier for the complex predicate ‘philosopher Frege’. For Given that $\llbracket \text{philosopher} \rrbracket = \lambda x[Px]$ and $\llbracket \text{Frege} \rrbracket = \lambda x[x = f]$, we get the result that

$$\llbracket \text{philosopher Frege} \rrbracket = \lambda x[Px \wedge x = f]$$

via an application of Predicate Modification. Predicate Modification will also give us the denotation I earlier proposed for ‘City of Oakland’, namely:

$$\llbracket \text{City of Oakland} \rrbracket = \lambda x[Cx \wedge x = o]$$

if we grant that ‘of’ is semantically vacuous, and that $\llbracket \text{City} \rrbracket = \lambda x[Cx]$ and $\llbracket \text{Oakland} \rrbracket = \lambda x[x = o]$.²⁹

To explain why proper names cannot function predicatively in copular sentences, we need one further claim: when a proper name is unmodified by a predicate, that is, when it occurs “on its own” outside the kind of context governed by Predicate Modification — for example, when it occurs in the subject position of a copular sentence, the argument position of transitive verb, the argument position of a functional noun,

²⁹Compare Heim and Kratzer (1998), who also treat ‘of’ as semantically vacuous.

or (crucially for our purposes) in postcopular position — then the name occurs in combination with a silent definite determiner.³⁰ That this is indeed so is again suggested by data from Swiss German, where, I've already remarked, the definite article is pronounced with names of people:

(17) (a) **Subject Position:**

[Der Joey Ramone] ist gross.

* [Joey Ramone] ist gross.

“Joey Ramone is tall.”

(b) **Verbal Argument:**

Der Oscar beneidet [die Alice].

* Der Oscar beneidet [Alice].

“Oscar envies Alice.”

(c) **Functional-Noun Argument:**

Der Vater von [der Annette] ist in Schulden geraten.

* Der Vater von [Annette] ist in Schulden geraten.

“The father of Annette has gotten into debt.”

(d) **Post-Copular Position:**

Der Jeffry Hyman ist [der Joey Ramone].

* Der Jeffry Hyman ist [Joey Ramone].

“Jeffry Hyman is Joey Ramone.”

The data from Swiss German also confirm — as our theory would predict — that in the context of an identificational definite like ‘the philosopher Frege’, where the name *is* modified by a predicate, the name occurs without a definite article immediately preceding it:

(18) **Identificational Definites:**³¹

Der philosoph [Frege] hat in Jena gearbeitet.

* Der philosoph [der Frege] hat in Jena gearbeitet.

“The philosopher Frege worked in Jena.”

³⁰Sloat (1969), Elbourne (2005), Matushansky (2006), and (more tentatively) Larson and Segal (1995), also defend views on which proper names involve a silent definite determiner. They however adopt a different view regarding the denotation of $\langle e, t \rangle$ type occurrences of proper names. See §8 for further discussion.

³¹The example here involves an identificational definite that does not contain ‘of’ in English. I use an ‘of’-free identificational definite because, as remarked earlier, there don’t appear to be any paradigm (i.e. ‘of’-including) identificational definites that denote human beings, but the definite article (into the distribution of which we are here inquiring) is generally only obligatory with names of people in Swiss German. There are some cases in which the definite article is required with names of non-human objects in Swiss German, specifically, names of certain countries (e.g. Switzerland, Iraq, and Iran, but not Italy, Germany or Mexico). The data here point in the same direction: ‘das Land [Schweiz] ist klein’ (i.e. ‘the country *of* Switzerland is small’) sounds somewhat awkward, but is more acceptable to my ear than ‘das Land [die Schweiz] ist klein’.

Given this view of the syntax and semantics of proper names, we correctly predict that proper names should be incapable of functioning predicatively in copular sentences, indeed, for the same reason that identificational definites are incapable of functioning predicatively. Since bare names denote identificational properties, the restriction on ‘the_p’ predicts that e.g. ‘THE_p Joey Ramone’ (using capitalized ‘THE’ for silent definite determiners) is inadmissible, and that we therefore do not get the predicative copular sentence ‘Jeffrey Hyman is [THE_p Joey Ramone]’. We can, by contrast, combine ‘the_r’ with a proper name, and thus generate the equative copular sentence ‘Jeffrey Hyman is [THE_r Joey Ramone].’ Proper names are thus, in effect, just a limit case of identificational definites. We get an overtly identificational definite (in which the definite article is pronounced even in English) when the name combines with a sortal noun before combining with the definite article, as in ‘Jeffrey Hyman is [the_r singer Joey Ramone]’.

8 Proper Names and Common Nouns

I have suggested that proper names are of type $\langle e, t \rangle$, and that when they occur in an unmodified context, they are preceded by a silent definite determiner. In this respect, I follow a number of other theorists.³² My treatment however differs from most in the particular $\langle e, t \rangle$ type denotation I assign to names: whereas I’ve assigned e.g. ‘Frege’ the semantic value $\lambda x[x = f]$, many others follow Burge (1973) in assigning names semantic values like $\lambda x[\text{Called-‘Frege’}(x)]$.³³ On such a view, names function as *common* nouns that are capable of being (at least potentially) *multiply*-satisfied. By contrast, on the proposal I favor, names denote identificational properties, and are, as such, capable of being satisfied by at most one thing. This difference is of course crucial to the explanation I have sought to give for the fact that names, and identificational definites like ‘the philosopher Frege’, are incapable of functioning predicatively.

Since my proposal departs from the more dominant view, let me say something about why one might be willing to accept the identificational view despite its less orthodox nature, though without pretending to an exhaustive treatment of the issue. The ‘called N’ view derives its strongest support from examples like the following, noted by Burge (1973):

- (19) (a) An Alfred Russell joined the club today.
 (b) Some Alfreds are crazy; some are sane.
 (c) Every Alfred I’ve met has been crazy.

As in the case of ‘THE Frege’, these constructions also involve a name preceded by a determiner; but in these cases, it seems quite clear that the name is interpreted as potentially multiply-satisfiable, and likely does have the kind of denotation Burge proposes. Thus, since names at least sometimes function in the

³²See the references in n30.

³³Elbourne (2005) ends up adopting something of an intermediate view, on which e.g. ‘THE Frege’ denotes $\iota x[x \text{ is called ‘Frege’} \wedge x = f]$. Interestingly, Quine at one point adopted a view of names broadly in line with the present proposal, though for rather different reasons (grinding “the old ontological axe,” as he once put it). He e.g. writes that “what suggests itself is that ‘= Pegasus’, ‘= mama’, ‘= Socrates’, etc. be parsed anew as indissoluble general terms, no separate recognition of singular terms ‘Pegasus’, ‘mama’, ‘Socrates’, etc. being needed ... ‘Socrates’ as singular term can be defined as ‘(ιx)(x is Socrates)’ on the basis of ‘Socrates’ as general term” (Quine, 1960, §37 and §39; one difference being that Quine construes the ι -operator in a Russellian fashion.).

‘called N’ manner, theoretical economy would appear to favor a view on which names quite generally receive these non-identificational properties as their semantic values.

There are, I think, two things to be said about this point. First, it is clear that names have uses that aren’t naturally captured by *either* the identificational view *or* by the ‘called N’ view. We can, for instance, say things like the following:

- (20) (a) He’s a real Napoleon.
(b) That’s so Oakland.
(c) I don’t know what it is that makes New York New York.

In these cases, the names seem to denote neither identificational properties nor a ‘called N’ properties (someone can e.g. be a real Napoleon without being called ‘Napoleon’), but rather seem to denote properties capturing certain characteristic features of the item that, as we might say, the name in question ordinarily names. Burge (1973) brushes such uses off as merely “metaphorical,” but it isn’t clear to me that these uses are more marginal than the ones Burge cites in support of his own proposal. The point, at any rate, is that since the ‘called N’ view is no more capable of capturing *all* the uses to which names can be put than the identificational view is, the argument from theoretical economy bears less weight than it may initially appear to.

Second, there are data involving the predicate complements of what I’ve called identificational definites that support the view that names sometimes *are* subject to an identificational interpretation rather than the kind of interpretation put forward on the ‘called N’ view. Consider the identificational definite ‘the philosopher Russell’. On the ‘called N’ view, the predicate complement here denotes $\lambda x[\text{Philosopher}(x) \wedge \text{Called-‘Russell’}(x)]$. Since there are many philosophers called ‘Russell’³⁴, the ‘called N’ view predicts that the predicate ‘philosopher Russell’ should be multiply satisfiable. Multiply-satisfiable predicates, however, are usually capable of being preceded by an indefinite article; and yet (21a) sounds remarkably better than (21b):

- (21) (a) I once met the philosopher Russell.
(b) *I once met a philosopher Russell.
(c) I once met a philosopher called ‘Russell’.

The ‘called N’ view furthermore gives us no explanation of why (21b) sounds worse than (21c). (Notice that the same results obtain if we use determiners like ‘some’ or ‘every’ in combination with the predicate ‘philosopher Russell’, or if we take an of-including identificational predicate like ‘City of Oakland’.) The identificational view, by contrast, predicts that (21a) should sound acceptable, but that (21b) should sound just as unacceptable as (22b)

- (22) (a) I once met the greatest French soldier.
(b) *I once met a greatest French soldier.

³⁴PhilPapers lists no fewer than twenty people who have published under this last name.

which also involves a predicate that is satisfiable by at most one person. This rather suggests that in modified contexts like ‘philosopher Frege’, names function in an identificational manner rather than in the manner proposed by the ‘called N’ view. Given that superficially bare proper names in post-copular position resist a predicative reading much in the way that identificational definites do, this suggests that proper names function identificationally in these cases as well, as I’ve proposed.

Let me take this opportunity to also address a somewhat different worry about my proposed treatment of identificational definites that the argument I’ve just presented likewise serves to allay. I have been taking it that in an identificational definite like ‘the philosopher Russell’, the phrase ‘philosopher Russell’ functions as a unified constituent that acts as the complement of the definite article. One might worry, however, that such phrases actually involve apposition, and should be parsed as ‘the philosopher, Russell’. On this view, the sortal noun ‘philosopher’ would act as the true complement to ‘the’, and ‘Russell’ would merely function as an appositive, non-restrictive element that adds a further bit of information about the particular philosopher independently picked out by ‘the philosopher’. We can see that this is in fact not the case by noting that, as Jackendoff (1984) points out, an indefinite article *is* acceptable when explicit apposition is involved:

(23) I once met a philosopher, Russell, and found him quite amiable.

A further piece of evidence against the appositional view of identificational definites, again due to Jackendoff (1984), is that in explicitly appositional cases, the NP complement to ‘the’ can be modified by a superlative, but that such modification is unacceptable in the case of identificational definites:

- (24) (a) I once met the most famous philosopher, Russell.
(b) *I once met the most famous philosopher Russell.

Identificational definites that (at least in English) include an ‘of’ exhibit the same behavior:

- (25) (a) I once visited the city of Shanghai.
(b) I once visited the most populous city, Shanghai.
(c) *I once visited the most populous city of Shanghai.³⁵

Jackendoff has it exactly right, I think, when he comments that “the function of an appositive is to add information about an *already* specified individual; it can never itself be the specification in virtue of which the NP in which it occurs is definite. ... By contrast, in [definites of the form *the + N + E*], *E* has the function of *uniquely specifying some individual in the category named by N*.”³⁶

It is precisely this fact that the ‘called N’ view is unable to respect: since on this view, proper names are multiply satisfiable, defenders of the view cannot account for the fact that the proper name in an identificational definite has the semantic function of specifying (indeed, I would say, of *identifying*) which *particular*

³⁵Interestingly, to get a halfway acceptable reading of this, one is forced to construe the definite as what I earlier called a possessive definite, i.e. to construe it on the model of ‘the most populous city of China’.

³⁶Jackendoff (1984, emphasis added). By *E*, Jackendoff means the expression that functions as the proper names do in the identificational definites we have been concerned with here.

individual among those satisfying the relevant sortal noun the description as a whole denotes. Again, this is of course not to say that names do not on occasion function in the manner proposed by the ‘called N’ view. In particular, when a name occurs in combination with a *non-definite* determiner as in (26a) or an explicit restrictor as in (26b):

- (26) (a) I have met every Russell.
 (b) The most famous Russell wrote ‘On Denoting’.

then the name must be interpreted as multiply satisfiable. It is just to say that this is *not* how the name functions in the context of an identificational definite. In the description ‘the most famous Russell’, the AP ‘most famous’ functions to restrict down to the most famous among the Russells; in the description ‘the philosopher Russell’, by contrast, the NP ‘philosopher’ does not serve (or is not most naturally interpreted as serving) to restrict down to the philosopher among the Russells — rather, the proper name ‘Russell’ serves to identify which particular philosopher the description as a whole denotes.

The same point can be made by observing that descriptions involving adjectival modification exhibit a peculiar ambiguity. Take the following example, cited by Matushansky (2006) and Sloat (1969), and originally due to Chomsky (1965):

- (27) The industrious Chinese built the Great Wall.

The definite description ‘the industrious Chinese’ exhibits an ambiguity: it can be understood as picking out the industrious among Chinese nationals, or it can be interpreted as picking out the Chinese (or their “sum”) among the category of the industrious. This example involves a plural description, but it can be replicated in the singular:

- (28) The prolific Russell wrote many books.

Again, the description can be interpreted as picking out the prolific one among the Russells, or as picking out Bertrand among the category of the prolific. These two readings can, I want to suggest, be understood as arising according to whether the proper name functions identificationally or not. We get the restrictive reading by interpreting the name as having a ‘called N’ meaning, yielding the semantic value given in (29a) for the predicate ‘prolific Russell’, and we get the non-restrictive reading by interpreting the name identificationally, yielding the semantic value given in (29b) for the predicate ‘prolific Russell’.³⁷

³⁷I do not, in this paper, seek to give an account of plural definite descriptions. Having mentioned the ‘industrious Chinese’ example, however, let me nevertheless hazard a parallel suggestion about how the ambiguity is generated in this case. Following Link (1983), plurals are often treated as denoting pluralities or “sums” of individuals. Using ‘ $x \prec xs$ ’ to say that x is among, or one of, the xs , we could take it that the two readings arise according to whether the plural ‘Chinese’ is interpreted along the lines of (a) or (b):

- (a) $\llbracket \text{Chinese} \rrbracket = \lambda x[x \prec \text{Chinese}]$
 (b) $\llbracket \text{Chinese} \rrbracket = \lambda x[x = \text{Chinese}]$

On the (a) reading, ‘Chinese’ is a multiply satisfiable predicate, and gives rise to the restrictive reading of ‘the industrious Chinese’, whereas on the (b) reading, ‘Chinese’ is uniquely satisfied (by the “plurality” of the Chinese), and gives rise to the non-restrictive reading.

- (29) (a) $\llbracket \text{prolific Russell} \rrbracket = \lambda x[\text{Prolific}(x) \wedge \text{Called-‘Russell’}(x)]$
 (b) $\llbracket \text{prolific Russell} \rrbracket = \lambda x[\text{Prolific}(x) \wedge x = r]$

The ‘called N’ view is unable to make sense of the felt ambiguity in such cases, since it is again unable to account for the reading generated by (29b) on which ‘Russell’ serves to identify particular individual among the prolific.

9 Throwing Away the Ladder: a Single Definite Determiner

Our two-determiner proposal succeeds where the type-shifting proposal failed: it allows us to accommodate predicative definite descriptions, while at the same time correctly predicting that superficially bare proper names and identificational definites cannot function predicatively. One drawback of the proposal is that it requires us to postulate the existence of two semantically distinct definite determiners. This feature of the proposal might be thought implausible, because if there really are two definite determiners, then we might expect this to be phonologically realized in other languages. There aren’t any languages that (to my knowledge) phonologically distinguished ‘the_p’ and ‘the_r’, however.

It isn’t clear that this objection is ultimately devastating. The objection rests on a point famously made by Kripke (1977) in relation to the referential/attributive distinction, namely, that if an expression is ambiguous in English, “we would expect the ambiguity to be disambiguated by separate and unrelated words in some other languages.” This objection however only carries full force if the ambiguity in question is, in some sense, *accidental*, as it is in the case of the ambiguity of ‘bank’ or the different meanings of ‘know’ (respectively expressed by e.g. ‘wissen’ and ‘kennen’ in German).³⁸ Compare, for instance, the ambiguity that is often thought to be involved in the case of connectives like ‘or’ and ‘and’. These connectives can have meanings of type $\langle t, \langle t, t \rangle \rangle$ — as in ‘Frege is a philosopher and Russell is too’, where ‘and’ connects two sentences — or meanings of type $\langle \langle e, t \rangle, \langle \langle e, t \rangle, \langle e, t \rangle \rangle \rangle$ — as in ‘Frege is a philosopher and a mathematician’, where ‘and’ connects two predicates. In this kind of case, the objection carries little weight: the two meanings of the connectives are systematically related via a simple type-shifting principle, so that once speakers have learned one of the meanings, they can easily derive the other.³⁹ There is therefore little reason to expect the ambiguity to be phonologically realized crosslinguistically in this case.

Our case of ‘the_r’ and ‘the_p’ is somewhat less clear-cut, since there doesn’t appear to be a simple type-shifting principle that would generate one meaning from the other. All the same, the meanings of ‘the_r’ and ‘the_p’ are clearly nowhere near as accidentally related as the various meanings of ‘bank’. The Kripkean objection we’ve been considering therefore isn’t decisive. That having been said, let me nevertheless close this discussion by briefly suggesting one way in which we might learn our lessons from the two-determiner proposal while at the same time making do with a single definite determiner.

In Rieppel (2012), I have argued that the kind of type-theoretic framework in which we’ve been conducting this investigation is ultimately deeply problematic. I there argue that, rather than understand the semantic difference between referential and predicative expressions in terms of a fundamental difference in

³⁸This point is made by Szabó (2000, n21).

³⁹Compare Heim and Kratzer (1998, §7.2.1 and §7.2.2).

the *kinds of things* that those expressions denote (e type items [entities] and $\langle e, t \rangle$ type items [properties], respectively), we instead understand that difference in terms of a difference in the *semantic relation* that those expressions bear to their semantic values: whereas predicative expressions *ascribe* things (specifically, properties), referring expressions *refer* to things.⁴⁰ Granted that proposal, we can then replace the type-theoretic principles for the interpretation of equative and predicative clauses (see §2 above) with the following:⁴¹

Equative: if $\exists x(\llbracket \alpha \rrbracket_R = x)$ and $\exists x(\llbracket \beta \rrbracket_R = x)$, then $\ulcorner \alpha \text{ is } \beta \urcorner$ is true iff $\llbracket \alpha \rrbracket_R = \llbracket \beta \rrbracket_R$

Predicative: if $\exists x(\llbracket \alpha \rrbracket_R = x)$ and $\exists x(\llbracket \beta \rrbracket_A = x)$, then $\ulcorner \alpha \text{ is } \beta \urcorner$ is true iff $\llbracket \beta \rrbracket_A(\llbracket \alpha \rrbracket_R) = 1$

How will this view let us make do with a single determiner? Simply: instead of distinguishing e.g. the referring description ‘the_r mayor of Oakland’ and the predicative description ‘the_p Mayor of Oakland’ by appeal to a difference in the determiner involved, we can say that there is only a *single* definite description ‘the mayor of Oakland’, but that this description is in the domain of *both* the reference relation *and* the ascription relation:

$$\llbracket \text{the mayor of Oakland} \rrbracket_R = \iota x[\text{M(o)}(x)]$$

$$\llbracket \text{the mayor of Oakland} \rrbracket_A = \lambda x[\text{M(o)}(x)]$$

We can get this result by holding that definite descriptions receive their semantic values in accordance with the following principles:

If $\exists x(\llbracket \alpha \rrbracket_A(x))$ and $\forall x \forall y(\llbracket \alpha \rrbracket_A(x) \wedge \llbracket \alpha \rrbracket_A(y) \rightarrow x = y)$, then $\llbracket \text{the } \alpha \rrbracket_R = \iota x[\llbracket \alpha \rrbracket_A(x)]$

and

If $\neg \text{Id}(\llbracket \alpha \rrbracket_A)$ and $\forall x \forall y(\llbracket \alpha \rrbracket_A(x) \wedge \llbracket \alpha \rrbracket_A(y) \rightarrow x = y)$, then $\llbracket \text{the } \alpha \rrbracket_A = \lambda x[\llbracket \alpha \rrbracket_A(x)]$

This proposal will again correctly predict that since the properties denoted by e.g. ‘philosopher Frege’ and ‘Joey Ramone’ are identificational, the definite descriptions ‘the philosopher Frege’ and ‘THE Joey Ramone’ cannot function as predicates, i.e. are not in the domain of the ascription relation, meaning that ‘THE Gottlob is the philosopher Frege’ and ‘THE Jeffry Hyman is THE Joey Ramone’ are only capable of receiving an equative reading, as desired. We thus achieve all of our desiderata, but without the need for

⁴⁰See Rieppel (2012) for elaboration. Briefly, one virtue of the view is that it allows us to grant that predicative expressions like ‘happy’ and referring expressions like the (identificational, it seems!) definite description ‘the property of being happy’ have the same semantic value. Where they differ is in the semantic relation they bear to that semantic value: while ‘happy’ bears the ascription relation to the property of being happy, the definite description ‘the property of being happy’ bears the reference relation to that property. Compare Wright (1998) and Searle (1969), who reach similar conclusions, albeit on somewhat different grounds.

⁴¹I use the subscripts ‘A’ and ‘R’ on the double brackets to distinguish the semantic relation of reference from that of ascription. $\exists x[\llbracket \alpha \rrbracket_R = x]$ thus means that α is in the domain of the reference function, i.e. that α is a referring expression; similarly, $\exists x[\llbracket \beta \rrbracket_A = x]$ means that β is in the domain of the ascription function, i.e. that β is an ascriptive (or predicative) expression. $\llbracket \beta \rrbracket_A(\llbracket \alpha \rrbracket_R) = 1$ can be read as saying that $\llbracket \alpha \rrbracket_R$ instantiates $\llbracket \beta \rrbracket_A$, i.e. that the item referred to by α instantiates the property ascribed by β . I should say that I use the terminology of ascription with some reservation: ascription is naturally understood as a three-place relation (x ascribes y to z), whereas I intend it to be a two-place relation. I trust the reader won’t be misled. As in the case of the type-theoretic principles of §2, we needn’t take these principles to be primitive, rather than the result of a deeper analysis, and needn’t deny that there may also be structural differences between predicative and equative sentences.

distinct descriptions involving different determiners. Since I am skeptical of the type-theoretic framework, I prefer the one-determiner proposal myself. I leave it to the consideration of the reader which view they prefer.

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