

This is the pre-peer reviewed version of the following article: Åkerman, J. 'The Communication Desideratum and Theories of Indexical Reference', which is published in final form in Mind & Language 30/4 (September 2015), pages 474–499, and is available online here: www.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/mila.12087/abstract. This article may be used for non-commercial purposes in accordance with [Wiley Terms and Conditions for Self-Archiving](#).

The Communication Desideratum and Theories of Indexical Reference

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Abstract: According to the communication desideratum (CD), a notion of semantic content must be adequately related to communication. In the recent debate on indexical reference, (CD) has been invoked in arguments against the view that intentions determine the semantic content of indexicals and demonstratives (intentionalism). In this paper, I argue that the interpretations of (CD) that these arguments rely on are questionable, and suggest an alternative interpretation, which is compatible with (strong) intentionalism. Moreover, I suggest an approach that combines elements of intentionalism with other subjectivist approaches, and discuss the role of intuitions in theorising about indexical reference.

Acknowledgements: Earlier versions of parts of this paper have been presented at seminars, workshops and conferences at Stockholm University (2010, 2011), Institut Jean Nicod (2011), Cerisy-La-Salle (2011), Vita-Salute San Raffaele University (2011), University of Gothenburg (2011), NTNU Trondheim (2013), and the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm (2013). I would like to thank the audiences on these occasions for helpful comments. Special thanks to Nat Hansen, Cathal O'Madagain, Peter Pagin, Mikael Pettersson, Andreas Stokke, and the editors and anonymous referees for *Mind & Language* for providing feedback on earlier drafts. The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Research Council under the European Community's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013)/ERC grant agreement no 229 441-CCC, and from the Swedish Research Council (Dnr 435-2010-454 and 421-2010-1542).

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1. Introduction

1.1. Aims and Overview

In order to properly evaluate a philosophical theory, we must consider it relative to the appropriate desiderata. What counts as the appropriate desiderata for a theory of a certain kind depends on the purpose of developing theories of this kind. Even when they are not explicitly stated, such desiderata may be reflected in more specific ideas about how certain central notions of the theory should be related. One such idea that has been prominent in the recent debate on indexical reference is that in order for a notion of indexical reference to be useful and interesting for the purposes of theorising about natural language, it must not be divorced from the notion of communication.¹ When put in this vague manner, this idea sounds rather plausible. After all, one of the main points of developing a semantic theory for a natural language L is to gain a better understanding of how communication with L works. Or, as Michael Devitt points out in a recent paper: ‘Our theoretical interest in language comes from our theoretical interest in thoughts and their communication’ (Devitt, *forthcoming*).

In what follows, I will not question the spirit of this idea. On the contrary, the following general *communication desideratum* for any notion of semantic content to be employed in a theory of natural language will be assumed to be basically correct:

- (CD) The notion of semantic content should be adequately related to the notion of communication.

However, even if we assent to (CD), we may, due to its imprecise formulation, disagree about its proper interpretation. In particular, we may disagree about what the adequate relation between semantic content and communication is supposed to be.

In the recent debate on indexical reference, different interpretations of (CD) have been invoked, more or less explicitly, in arguments directed against the view that the mental states of the speaker determine the semantic content of indexicals and demonstratives.² Although these mental states need not be construed as intentions, this view will henceforth be referred to as *intentionalism*. In what follows, I argue that these objections against intentionalism can be resisted, since the interpretations of (CD) that they rely on are questionable. I

¹ For instance, see Gorvett (2005, 300).

² Defenders of this view include Åkerman (2009, 2010), Montminy (2010) and Predelli (1998a, 1998b).

also discuss a weak form of intentionalism, which embraces the ideas behind the objections, and I argue that these concessions are not mandatory. Then, I propose an alternative interpretation of (CD), which is compatible with a strong form of intentionalism, and I suggest an approach that combines elements of intentionalism with other subjectivist approaches. I conclude with some methodological remarks.

The overarching aim of this paper is to shed light on the role that different interpretations of (CD) can play in theorising about indexical reference, and to show the importance of taking theoretical desiderata into consideration in evaluating rival theories, rather than merely relying on intuitions about cases. But I begin with some remarks on the general framework and terminology that form the basis of the following discussion.

1.2 Preliminaries

It is an uncontroversial fact that natural languages contain context sensitive expressions. The extent of this phenomenon is more controversial, but not even semantic minimalists (like Cappelen and Lepore 2005) deny that there are indexical and demonstrative expressions, like, ‘I’, ‘here’, ‘now’, and ‘that’, whose contents vary with certain features of the utterance situation, although there is quite some controversy concerning the details of their treatment. The discussion in this paper, however, is restricted to the metasemantic (or representational) question of what features of the utterance situation are relevant for determining the semantic content of indexical and demonstrative expressions, a question that occupies a central place in the recent literature on indexical reference.

Even if indexical expressions can be used to express different things on different occasions, there is something that remains constant across these different uses. As David Kaplan (1989a, 500–507) famously pointed out, we can account for this by distinguishing between two levels of ‘meaning’. On one level, we have the *character*, which corresponds to the conventional *standing meaning*, i.e. the ‘meaning rule’ which remains constant across different utterance situations. On another level, we have the *content*, which corresponds to what is expressed, or ‘what is said’ on a given occasion. In Kaplan’s formal framework, an utterance situation is represented by an index containing parameters like agent, place, time, and world. Such indices are called *contexts*, and the character of an expression can thus be described as a function from contexts to contents. The context sensitivity of indexicals shows up in that they have *variant* functions as characters, i.e. functions that may give different values relative to different arguments.

The context is to be distinguished from the *circumstance of evaluation*, which is an index containing parameters against which the content is to be evaluated.

Exactly which parameters should be included in the circumstance of evaluation is a controversial matter, but at a minimum, it will contain a possible world, in which case the content can be described as a function from possible worlds to extensions. The distinction between context and circumstance of evaluation is important for several reasons, but for present purposes, there is another distinction which is more important, namely that between ‘context’ understood as an index and ‘context’ understood as a real situation in which an utterance takes place. The former is an abstract representation of the latter within the formal system, while the latter is an event taking place in the real world.

Kaplan had good reasons for insisting on the distinction between context as index and context as real utterance situation, and he explicitly warned against assimilating his technical notion of sentences-in-contexts to real utterances (cf. Kaplan 1989a, 549). One of his main goals was to construct a logic for languages containing indexicals and demonstratives, LD, with a corresponding notion of LD-validity, i.e. truth/validity relative to any context. In the light of this, the importance of the distinction can be illustrated by means of a simple example. Consider the argument ‘Steve is alive now. Hence, Steve is alive now’. This should come out as LD-valid, and it will, as long as the ‘context’ is taken to be an index rather than a real situation; the conclusion of the argument will be true whenever the premise is true, relative to any index. In contrast, if we take the ‘context’ to be a real utterance situation, it is easy to come up with a case where the premise is true and the conclusion is false, viz. a case in which Steve tragically passes away between the utterance of the premise and the utterance of the conclusion. Clearly then, identifying contexts with real utterance situations rather than indices would not have furthered Kaplan’s goals.

As long as we are only concerned with logical relations, we can legitimately abstract away from certain contingent facts about real utterances, and restrict our attention to the formal notion of contexts as indices. But when we turn to the question that we are presently interested in, namely the representational question of what features of the utterance situation determine the semantic content of indexicals, this restriction seems inappropriate. After all, our concern here is not only with logical relations, but also with the real life situations in which the utterances take place. How could we even begin to theorise about how features of these real situations contribute to semantic content if we were to restrict ourselves to Kaplan’s abstract formal notion of context? Clearly, we need to approach these matters in a different way. But how?

One might think that we should simply drop the abstract formal notion and replace it with a different notion, which suits our present purposes better.³ However, I think that a better way to proceed would be to keep the formal notion, add a second notion, and follow Kaplan's advice to sharply distinguish between them. To avoid conflation, I shall henceforth use the term 'context-index' to refer to Kaplan's formal notion, and '(real) utterance situation' to refer to the second notion. There are (at least) two reasons for preferring this approach. Firstly, it does justice to the fact that in the recent debate on indexical reference, something like Kaplan's formal semantics is assumed to be in place already.⁴ Thus, something like the formal notion of a context-index will still have to figure in the overall theory, and this means that we cannot simply drop it. Secondly, this approach allows us to give a clear and precise statement of what the disagreement between the rival theories consists in. As indicated above, it concerns the metasemantic account of the relation between real utterance situations and context-indices, the latter of which are supposed to represent the former within the formal framework. (Cf. Kaplan 1989b, 573.)

Accordingly, the kind of theory that will be in focus in the next couple of sections—viz. intentionalism—can now be somewhat more precisely characterized as the view that the context-index pertaining to an utterance is the one that is determined by the relevant mental states of the speaker. Now it is time to turn to the abovementioned objections to this view, and the roles that different interpretations of (CD) play in these.

2. Communication and Content

2.1 Communicability

One way to spell out the adequate relation mentioned in (CD) is to say that the notion of semantic content is adequately related to the notion of communication only if the semantic content expressed by an utterance is always available to the audience. This gives us the following *strong communicability* version of (CD):

- (CD_{sc}) The notion of semantic content should be such that the audience is always in a position to infer the semantic content of an utterance on the basis of the evidence available in the utterance situation.

³ For a suggestion to this effect, see Cohen (2013, 10).

⁴ For instance, see Predelli (1998a, 113; 1998b, 413n), Romdenh-Romluc (2002, 40–41), Gauker (2008, 361–362), and Åkerman (2009, 156).

Since intentions are not publicly available independently of external evidence, intentionalism allows for situations in which the content of an utterance is not available to anyone but the speaker herself, viz. situations in which the external evidence is insufficient to allow the audience to infer the content of the utterance.⁵ Thus, intentionalism⁶ conflicts with (CD_{sc}). The question, then, is whether this gives us good reasons to reject intentionalism, or whether we might instead reject (CD_{sc}).

A recent critic of intentionalism, Komarine Romdenh-Romluc, argues, in effect, that we must stick to (CD_{sc}) in order to stay faithful to the idea that the meaning of the expressions of natural languages are public:

To claim, as [the intentionalist] does, that there are utterances which cannot communicate anything because no-one apart from the utterer knows the reference of expressions occurring in them, is to say that only the utterer can understand them, and this is to deny that those utterances have public meaning. Since we are theorising about public language, this conclusion is unacceptable. (Romdenh-Romluc 2006, 265)

However, this is a bit exaggerated. Intentionalism about indexical reference is merely a theory about how certain features of the utterance situation determine contents together with the standing meaning (character) of indexicals and demonstratives. Thus, even in a situation where the semantic contents of such expressions are not available to anyone but the speaker, the meaning (characters) of the relevant expressions of the utterance may still be perfectly available to the audience. Given the character-content distinction (which Romdenh-Romluc and other critics of intentionalism accept), unavailability of content does not entail unavailability of meaning (cf. Åkerman 2010, 357).

Moreover, the sense in which the semantic content of an indexical or demonstrative expression can be unavailable to anyone except the speaker if (CD_{sc}) fails to hold does not necessarily conflict with the idea that semantic content, like meaning, is public in nature. There is nothing about these contents that make them in principle unavailable to anyone except the speaker. They do not contain any essentially 'private' components, and they are not of

⁵ At least as long as no *further* constraints are put on referential intention or reference. There are various ways in which intentionalism could be weakened, an issue that we shall turn to shortly.

⁶ That is to say, intentionalism in the unconstrained form that we have been considering so far. As we shall see, there are versions of intentionalism that can accommodate (CD_{sc}).

an essentially incommunicable *kind*.⁷ For instance, there is nothing about intentionalism that excludes the possibility that the audience succeed in interpreting the utterance on a later occasion, when presented with further evidence. In other words, the utterances in question may well be interpretable *in principle*, or given a sufficiently enlarged pool of evidence. It is just that in the very utterance situation, the available evidence is not sufficient to put the audience in a position to grasp the content by applying their standard (reliable) evidence-based interpretation method.

Here it is helpful to distinguish between two notions of publicness: a stronger one that requires that meaning/content is actually available, and a weaker one that only requires that the meaning/content is in principle available.⁸ Publicness requirements on natural languages endorsed in the philosophical literature usually invoke the weaker notion, but only the stronger one supports (CD_{sc}).⁹ In fact, not even Romdenh-Romluc herself appears to endorse the stronger publicness requirement, since in a passage immediately preceding the passage quoted above, she characterises publicness of meaning in a way that suggests that she prefers the weaker notion:

Surely what it means to say that an utterance has a public meaning is just that the meaning can in principle be grasped—i.e., the utterance can in principle be understood—by more people than just the utterer.
(Romdenh-Romluc 2006, 265)

This makes it difficult to see how the objection is supposed to work. Moreover, there are reasons to be sceptical about the stronger publicness requirement, which reasons also count directly against (CD_{sc}). It just seems wrong to say that an utterance cannot express a semantic content simply because it is not actually interpretable on the basis of the available evidence. To take a famous (fictional) example, consider Charles Foster Kane's utterance of the word 'Rosebud' on his deathbed. That utterance is most plausibly taken to refer to the sled bearing this name, even if no one is actually in a position to figure that out on the basis of the evidence actually provided. The weaker requirement is more plausible, since it allows for such utterances to have meaning/content. For present purposes we need not go into details about how, more precisely,

⁷ Craig (1982, 556) makes a similar point about reference to unobservables in thoughts about others' inner states: 'maybe I cannot observe your inner states, but it does not follow that they are not a *kind of thing* which I can observe.'

⁸ Cf. the distinction between *basic publicness* and *standard publicness* drawn in Pagin (2000, 164).

⁹ Famous proponents of publicness requirements include Quine (1960, ix), Dummett (1978, 216) and Davidson (1986b, 315). For a discussion of how these authors are to be interpreted with respect to this issue, see Stjernberg (1991). See also Pagin (2000) for further discussion of Quine's view.

the publicness requirement should be understood.¹⁰ The important things to note are, firstly, that it is far from clear that the intentionalist's notion of semantic content would fail to satisfy a weaker version of the publicness constraint, and secondly, that even if we were to adopt some stronger version which this notion of semantic content failed to satisfy, it would not follow from intentionalism that meaning (character) could not be public in this stronger sense. In sum, general considerations about publicness do not seem to offer any solid support for (CD_{SC}), and there also seem to be some reason to be sceptical about it.

Nevertheless, one might still find (CD_{SC}) attractive to the extent that one thinks that there is something unattractive about the idea that some utterances can express contents even though the intended audience is not in a position to interpret them. Even if their contents are not in principle unavailable in any obviously problematic sense, one may still feel that there is something defective about them in that they, in a certain sense, fail to be communicative. Moreover, one may think that this communicative deficiency makes them unsuitable as bearers of reference, at least if the notion of reference is to retain its status as a philosophically interesting notion. Jonathan Gorvett appears to have something like this in mind when he complains as follows about the notion of reference that comes with intentionalism:

[It] is simply a relationship between a word and an object, but one that does not require or entail successful communication. That a word refers to an object does not mean that it can necessarily be used to communicate a thought about that object. (Gorvett 2005, 300)

Later in the same paper, Gorvett (2005, 306) complains that this is not an interesting, useful, or even coherent notion of reference. This raises the following question: What, more precisely, should we demand from an interesting, useful and coherent notion of reference?

It seems too strong to demand, as the first sentence of the quote seems to suggest, that reference 'require' or 'entail' successful communication. We need to leave room for instances of communicative failure, in which the speaker semantically expresses a certain content, but where the audience simply fails to grasp it (even if they are, in some sense, in a position to grasp it). Moreover, given this strong a demand, the objection would apply to views of the kind that Gorvett and Romdenh-Romluc defend as well, i.e. views according to which reference turns on what the audience can reasonably be expected to grasp on

¹⁰ One alternative would be to invoke a broadly Davidsonian model of radical interpretation (cf. Davidson 1973), and define publicness in terms of what a fully informed interpreter could learn from the relevant kind of observations (cf. Davidson 1986b, 315).

the basis of the available evidence, including shared practices (or ‘conventions’ as Gorvett (2005, 296–297 prefers to call them). There may be a shared practice, which could guide the audience to the correct interpretation, and it may be reasonable to expect the audience to grasp the content, even in cases where the actual audience fails to live up to these expectations. So, not only does this kind of connection seem implausibly strong, but it also seems very unlikely that this was what Gorvett had in mind.

Rather, as the second sentence of the quote suggests, it is more plausible to take the idea behind Gorvett’s objection to be that in order for a notion of semantic content (including reference) to be philosophically interesting (and useful and coherent), it must satisfy something like (CD_{SC}). This also fits well with other passages in Gorvett (2005)¹¹ and the first passage by Romdenh-Romluc (2006) quoted above, if we take her point to apply to content rather than meaning (character). Before we turn to the question of how this and similar ideas could be given some more substantial backup, let us briefly consider the possibility of weakening the intentionalist position in order to accommodate (CD_{SC}).

Although (CD_{SC}) conflicts with the kind of intentionalism we have considered so far, one need not endorse a wholesale rejection of intentionalism in order to coherently accept (CD_{SC}). Indeed, one may, like Andreas Stokke (2010, 387–389), weaken the intentionalist position by adding an ‘uptake’ constraint like (CD_{SC}). On the resulting view, it is not enough that the speaker intends to refer to a certain object; the audience must also be in a position to grasp the referent in order for a semantic content to be expressed. Stokke also suggests that we should adopt a communicative constraint on intention forming, according to which one must intend that the audience grasp the intended referent in order to count as having such a referential intention. In this way, the speaker’s referential intention must be accompanied by (or be identical with) a certain kind of communicative intention. Moreover, since intentions are constrained by beliefs, it follows that the speaker must believe that it is possible (or at least that it is not impossible) for the audience to grasp the content. This is simply an instance of the general principle that one cannot intend what one believes to be impossible. Putting all of this together, we get the following version of (CD):

¹¹ Gorvett (2005, 302–306) suggests that the interesting notion here is a conventional notion of linguistic possibility, according to which it is possible to express a content just in case there is a (possibly tacit) convention in play in the situation at hand. Since the role of such conventions is to put the audience in a position to interpret the message on the basis of the utterance, they can be seen as forming part of the features making up the audience’s epistemic position.

- (CD_{CI}) The notion of semantic content should be such that a genuine intention to refer requires that the speaker intend (and thus does not think it impossible) that the audience grasp the referent.

Stokke's weak intentionalism combines (CD_{SC}) and (CD_{CI}). Let us now turn to the question of how the ideas and motivations behind these constraints could be spelled out.

2.2 Communicative Practice

When it comes to the uptake condition stated in (CD_{SC}), Stokke (2010, 388) remarks that the idea behind it would be 'exceedingly difficult' to spell out in detail, and thus he rests content with relying on its intuitive substance, and relating it to a broadly Gricean approach (which will be discussed in the next section). As regards the condition on intention forming stated in (CD_{CI}), Stokke suggests, in effect, that it can be defended by appeal to the notion of a communicative practice:

Consider the following example. A U.S. Customs Officer says to a woman who speaks no English and whom the Customs Officer knows speaks no English:

(5) Now I'm going to explain to you why you are in violation of your visa so that you can't say that you haven't heard it.

The pronoun *you* is an intention-sensitive referential expression. To refer to her interlocutor with *you*, therefore, the Officer must have an intention to do so. And, given the view I subscribe to, to have such an intention, the Officer must believe that the woman is in a position to recognize that intention. But since the Officer knows the woman speaks no English, she cannot have such a belief. Hence, she does not have a genuine intention to refer. And therefore, she does not succeed in referring to the woman with *you*. In my view, this description of the above example is intuitively compelling. There is a strong sense in which the Officer is not engaged in what we take to be earnest communicative practice. (Stokke 2010, 389-390)

Whatever we think of this case, it should be clear that Stokke takes the alleged reference failure to be explainable in terms of the speaker's failing to meet the standards of the relevant communicative practice. The focus in the quoted passage is on failure to fulfil the condition in (CD_{CI}), but since the condition in (CD_{SC}) is not fulfilled either, this case may be taken to illustrate a double failure to conform to communicative practice. Even if the Officer had believed (falsely) that the woman would be in a position to understand her utterance, she would, according to (CD_{SC}), have failed to refer to the woman with 'you'.

This may be explained in terms of a failure to conform to genuine communicative practice in a way similar to that exemplified by the passage by Stokke just quoted.

The idea here would be that the conditions on semantic content stated in (CD_{sc}) and (CD_{cl}) reflect conditions on genuine communicative practice, and that this makes them suitable as constraints on semantic content as well. To connect back to the idea behind Gorvett's objection, one might say that in order to be interesting, useful and coherent, any notion of semantic content must obey these constraints, since to demand anything less would be to divorce the notion of content from the notion of communication. On an approach of this kind, linguistic expressions can be used to express semantic contents only insofar as they are uttered in a genuinely communicative way, thus forming part of a genuine communicative practice.

But why take deviance from genuine communicative practice to entail failure to express semantic contents? Well, it may be argued that the features of the communicative practice reflected in the constraints are in some sense essential to, or definitional of what it takes for something to count as being part of a language. This way of thinking connects to a venerable tradition, which can be traced back at least as far as the writings of John Locke. Famously, Locke took language to be defined by its function, and he took the primary and definitional function of language to be that of facilitating communication (cf. Locke 1690, III, ii, 1). Linguistic expressions are not intrinsically meaningful, but what makes them meaningful is that they are used to fulfil this primary function. If they have no communicative function, they cannot be regarded as having any semantic properties. Following this line of thought, it could be argued that there cannot be any genuine, meaningful use of language outside the communicative practice in which the language have developed, and that consequently, there cannot be any reference in cases that do not count as falling within the communicative practice.¹² Thus, the notion of semantic content should be constrained accordingly, by imposing (CD_{sc}) and (CD_{cl}) .

However, even if we assume that the broadly Lockean picture just sketched is basically correct, it does not follow from this assumption that the expressions of the language cannot be successfully used for expression of

¹² One may perhaps also put a Wittgensteinian twist on this argument: If the referent is private and thus has no place at all in the language game (like the beetle in the box), it 'cancels out' (Wittgenstein, 1953, §294). I shall not pursue a discussion of this idea here, but in this connection it is important to remember the points made in 2.1 concerning publicness and privacy. Intentionalism does not entail that the referent of indexicals and demonstratives can be essentially private in anything like the strong sense needed in order to get this kind of argument going.

semantic content outside the communicative practice in which the language has been developed and sustained. In other words, one could accept that the primary and definitional function of language is to facilitate communication—or, to use a well-worn metaphor, one could think about language as a tool, which has been developed and sustained because it facilitates communication,¹³ and which counts as being the very thing it is in virtue of this very fact—without thereby committing oneself to the constraints on semantic content suggested by critics of strong intentionalism.

Consider a tribe that develops spears in order to use them for hunting. The use of the spears is developed and sustained within a certain hunting practice, precisely because the spears facilitate hunting (and thereby further the well-being of the tribe), and they facilitate hunting in virtue of having certain properties, e.g. being such that one can throw them at an animal at a distance and thereby kill it. But this does not mean that one cannot use the spear in order to kill in this way outside the hunting practice, and analogously, the (assumed) fact that language has been developed and sustained within a communicative practice (precisely because it facilitates communication) does not entail that linguistic expressions cannot be used outside this communicative practice in order to express contents.

On the one hand, consider the use of hunting spears. The ultimate purpose within the hunting practice is successful hunting, and throwing the spear at one's target and thereby killing it is the means by which one tries to achieve this purpose. If one decides to use the spear outside the hunting practice, for instance by throwing it at a fellow tribesman, one may succeed in using the spear to kill one's target without thereby succeeding in hunting. On the other hand, consider the use of language. The ultimate purpose within the communicative practice is successful communication,¹⁴ and uttering a certain expression with a certain content is (part of) the means by which one tries to achieve it. If one decides to use the expression outside the communicative practice, for instance in a situation in which one knows that the audience is not in a position to grasp the content, one may still succeed in using the expression to express a certain content without thereby achieving communicative success. Moreover, just as one can use the hunting spear to kill without having an intention to hunt, one can use an expression to express a content without

¹³ Or as Dummett (1978, 226) puts it, adopt the 'view of language as an instrument of social communication.'

¹⁴ Strictly speaking, this need not always be true, since speakers will more often than not have other illocutionary and perlocutionary purposes over and above just communicating semantic contents. In view of this, it might be better to say that what is under consideration here is the restricted part of communication that is most immediately relevant for present purposes.

having an intention that this content be grasped (and without there being any real possibility of communicative success).

That linguistic expressions are, on occasion, used in this uncommunicative manner does not mean that they lose their status as tools of communication. It may well be a plausible requirement on a linguistic expression that is to serve the function of a social device of communication that audiences *most often* be—and be intended and believed to be—in a position to grasp the content it is used to express. But even if it seems plausible to demand that a tool for communication for *the most part* or *primarily* be used as part of a genuinely communicative practice, this condition need not be fulfilled in each individual case.¹⁵ In other words, even if we take (CD_{SC}) and (CD_{CI}) to reflect conditions that are constitutive of genuine communicative practice, and even if we agree that these conditions should be, by and large, satisfied by the linguistic practice as a whole in order for ascriptions of meaning and content to make sense, we need not agree that they must be satisfied by every instance of meaningful speech. And as we resist this final step, we can coherently hold on to strong intentionalism. A tool may, on occasion, be successfully used for other purposes than its primary and defining ones.

The analogy between hunting spears and linguistic expressions may not be perfect, and it is not intended as a conclusive argument against (CD_{SC}) and (CD_{CI}). Nevertheless, the parallels between the two cases serve to illustrate the crucial point, namely that we could accept the abovementioned general ideas concerning what it takes in order for something to serve a communicative function without thereby committing ourselves to the claim that expression of semantic content is not possible outside of the relevant communicative practice. Even if we accept that we should, as Michael Dummett (1978, 226) puts it, take ‘with full seriousness the view of language as an instrument of social communication,’ it is far from clear that intentionalism is thereby ruled out. Of course, any theory must at the very least be compatible with a plausible account of how communication works, but the arguments considered so far fall short of showing that intentionalism fails this test.¹⁶ We shall return to these issues shortly.

¹⁵ This is an adaptation of the distinction between applying a condition on the event level and applying it on the method level, which is drawn by Pagin (2008, 99) in his discussion on conditions for communicative success. See e.g. Pagin’s (2008, 107) claim that the knowledge requirement on communicative success is suitable at method level (but not at event level)

¹⁶ As Edward Craig (1982, 554) points out, even if it is clear that any theory must ‘permit an account of how we communicate,’ it is not so clear what it take to pass this test. In particular, it is far from clear that theories that appeal to inner states fail it.

2.3 The Gricean Approach

Another possible basis for the idea that expression of semantic content is not possible outside of the relevant communicative practice is suggested by Stokke (2010, 388–389), who appeals to a broadly Gricean outlook, according to which content-determinative intentions are essentially tied to communicative intentions, by being part of, or identical with them. As such, they will be constrained by the speaker's beliefs and expectations about what he can achieve by using certain words, in the way specified by the condition on intention forming in (CD_{CI}). Stokke also takes the uptake constraint stated in (CD_{SC}) to be motivated by a broadly Gricean approach to communication.

However, although many find this Gricean approach attractive, it cannot be used to back up an argument against strong intentionalism without undermining its dialectical force. The reason for this is simple: the strong intentionalist is not committed to this approach. Indeed, if one sympathises with the points made so far concerning the objections against (strong) intentionalism, one is likely to find this Gricean picture unattractive precisely because it gets the relation between communication and content wrong. Consider again the analogy between language and hunting spears. Just as one can use the hunting spear outside of the hunting practice to kill a fellow tribesman in virtue of the very properties that makes the spear suitable for hunting, one can use language to express a certain semantic content outside of the communicative practice, in virtue of the very properties that make language suitable for communication, including its representational properties. Just as we can use the spear for hunting because it has certain properties, not the other way around, we can use language to communicate because it has certain representational properties. If this is right, it should be possible to express semantic contents even in situations where neither the uptake constraint nor the communicative constraint on intention forming is satisfied.

Moreover, the Gricean approach is not the only game in town. To illustrate what an alternative might look like, consider John Searle's claim that representational intentions in general should be distinguished from communicative intentions:

Communicating is a matter of producing certain effects on one's hearers, but one can intend to represent something without caring at all about the effects on one's hearers. One can make a statement without intending to produce conviction or belief in one's hearers or without intending to get them to believe that the speaker believes what he says or indeed without even intending to get them to understand it at all. There are, therefore, two aspects of meaning intentions, the intention to represent and the intention to communicate. (Searle 1983, 165-166)

Searle complains that the philosophical discussion of representational intentions, including his own earlier work, which was heavily influenced by Grice, suffers from a failure to distinguish them from communicative intentions. Moreover, Searle claims that we not only need to separate communication and representation, we should also treat representation as prior to communication:

On the present account, representation is prior to communication and representing intentions are prior to communication intentions. [...] One can intend to represent without intending to communicate, but one cannot intend to communicate without intending to represent. I cannot, for example, intend to inform you that it is raining without intending that my utterance represent, truly or falsely, the state of affairs of the weather.¹⁷ (Searle 1983, 166)

This is more or less the kind of approach that one might expect strong intentionalists about indexical reference to take with respect to referential intentions concerning indexicals. Given this, a compelling argument against strong intentionalism cannot be based on an appeal to the Gricean view that Searle rejects.

In order to relate back to the idea that we cannot coherently separate content from communication, let us pause for a few remarks on the sense in which reference is divorced from and prior to communication on the non-Gricean view just presented. Of course, there are many ways in which particular representational intentions may be said to depend on previous communication and communicative intentions. The contents of many of our representational intentions may be the result of previous interaction with other speakers, representational intentions may be triggered by more general communicative intentions, and languages may have developed in order to satisfy some pre-linguistic communicative intentions. But this does not mean that each particular representational intention should be analysed as a kind of communicative intention.

It also seems correct to say that in the standard cases occurring within the communicative practice, particular representational intentions are typically accompanied by corresponding particular communicative intentions, and these cases may well be central or basic with respect to the purpose of understanding the nature of language. But this in itself does not motivate constraints that exclude the possibility of meaning or reference in non-central cases. More

¹⁷ This last remark does not seem quite right. I may intend to inform you that it is raining by saying 'You'll need an umbrella' without intending my utterance to represent the state of affairs of the weather. However, we need not dwell on this, since the important point for present purposes is that one may intend to represent without thereby intending to communicate.

specifically, the standard cases in which a speaker intends to use an expression to refer to an object may well be such that the speaker has a communicative intention, namely the intention to communicate something about that object to an audience, and of course, good explanations of the speaker's (verbal) behaviour in such cases will have to include the communicative intentions. However, this does not mean that we should exclude the possibility of cases of semantic reference in which the speaker lacks a genuine communicative intention, like cases in which people talk to pets, babies, or even dead people (cf. Davis 2003, 66). For illustration, consider a father who turns to his two-month old child (who has just had a frightening experience) and says: 'Calm down, you're safe now here with me.' In such a case the speaker cannot be ascribed a communicative intention of the kind described above (since that would require that he believe that the child is in a position to grasp the intended referents), and thus he does not satisfy the proposed communicative constraint on the forming of genuine referential intentions. But it seems wrong to deny that he can, in this very case, intend to use 'you' to refer to the child, 'me' to refer to himself, and so on, and it seems rather plausible that he can also succeed in so referring, even if he is fully aware that the child cannot understand the expressions in this way.

To sum up our findings so far, strong intentionalists are in a good position to reject (CD_{sc}) and (CD_{ci}), and thus they can resist objections based on them. But even if they reject the constraints themselves, they can still accommodate plausible versions of the ideas about publicness and communicative practices that were meant to motivate them. Moreover, the sense in which content and communication is divorced on the non-Gricean approach just suggested does not seem to yield an incoherent notion of content. What is still missing, however, is an interpretation of (CD) that is compatible with strong intentionalism. This will be provided in the next section.

2.4 Accounting for Communication

As emphasized in the introduction, one of the main points of developing semantic theories is to get a better understanding of how language works, and we have a particularly strong interest in understanding how communication works. Even if one does not think that a shared language is essential for communication, or that the semantic theory corresponds to some real mechanism in the interpreter, one can still take semantics to have an important role to play in a description of what speakers and interpreters are doing, and the high frequency of communicative success (cf. Davidson 1986a, 163–164). So, in developing a theory for a language we should be careful to design its parts so that it can, as a whole, contribute to understanding of how interpretation and communication works. When it comes to a metasemantic

account of the kind presently under discussion, we should make sure not only that it permits an account of how we communicate, but also that the notion of semantic content that comes with it is such that it has a role to play in this account. In order to count as a philosophically interesting notion in this context, it should not be communicatively redundant, as it were. Accordingly, I would like to suggest the following understanding of (CD):

(CD_{AC}) The notion of semantic content should have a substantial role to play in the account of communication.

Strong intentionalism is compatible with (CD_{AC}), since what counts as the semantic content according to strong intentionalism—let us call this the *intended content*—has a central role to play in a very natural characterisation of communicative success. For illustration, consider a speaker S who wants to get across a certain message to her audience A by uttering a sentence containing indexical expressions. Suppose that S and A are attending a political meeting, where X is giving an agitated speech in which he is criticizing Y. S says: ‘He is such an idiot’. Given the circumstances, the two obvious candidate referents for ‘he’ as used by S are X and Y. It may be somewhat unclear to A which of these S has in mind, but if S intended to use ‘he’ to refer to X, communicative success (with respect to the semantic content of ‘he’) will be achieved if and only if A interprets ‘he’ as referring to X. This remains true even if the available evidence speaks in favour of the alternative interpretation. Indeed, as long as we restrict ourselves to the requirements on correct interpretation, it does not matter what evidence is available to A. Suppose that S has gotten tired of listening to the speech they are attending, and started day dreaming about of some other person Z, whom A is not even familiar with, and intends Z to be the referent of ‘he’. What A would need to take ‘he’ to refer to if communication is to succeed is the intended referent, i.e. Z.¹⁸

We may also think about linguistic communication in terms of a certain kind of coordination (cf. Lewis, 1969). What needs to be coordinated are the speaker’s and the audience’s interpretations of the expressions as used by the

¹⁸ Of course, it is difficult to see how A could arrive at this interpretation on the basis of the available evidence, so unless we want to say that communicative success can be achieved by mere coincidence or guesswork on the interpreter’s part, we cannot say that we would have had a case of communicative success in this very situation if A had taken ‘he’ to refer to Z. In order to specify a counterfactual situation in which A arrives at the intended interpretation as a result of applying a reliable evidence-based method of interpretation, we must modify A’s epistemic position as well as her referent assignment. However, one may also embrace the idea that communication can succeed by luck, as suggested by e.g. Davidson (1986a, 446), Byrne & Thau (1996, 148), and Pagin (2008, 109).

speaker on the relevant occasion. Since the speaker's referential intentions may be taken to determine her interpretation of the indexicals as presently used by her, the audience's goal will be to assign the intended content to these expressions. In this sense, interpretation aims at intended content, and communicative success consists in interpretative convergence between speaker and audience.¹⁹

So, it seems clear that the notion of intended content has an important role to play in an account of communication. Neither objective features of the situation nor facts about the audience's epistemic position (invariantly) pick out the referential assignment which the interpreter must make in order to succeed, so neither of the other candidate notions of semantic content in the debate on indexical reference (including weak intentionalist notions) could play the role that the intended content plays in the above characterisation of communicative success. In other words, there is an essential component in this simple account of communication, which corresponds uniquely to the strong intentionalist's notion of semantic content, and this shows that even if this notion of semantic content fails to satisfy (CD_{SC}) and (CD_{CI}) , it satisfies (CD_{AC}) . Thus, it should not be ruled out as philosophically uninteresting.

But one might ask how much of a constraint (CD_{AC}) really is. It seems clear that it is not only the intended content that has an essential role to play in an account of communication of the kind sketched above. What matters for communicative success is that the audience grasp the intended content, as a result of interpretation of the communicative act. The possibility (in the relevant sense) of communicative success depends on whether the audience can arrive at the intended interpretation on the basis of the evidence available in the utterance situation. So, it seems that the content that the audience assigns to the expressions uttered by applying a reliable method of interpretation—let us call this the audience's content—also has an essential role to play in this account of communication. Indeed, one may describe instances of communicative success as cases in which the audience's content and the intended content coincide. Thus, it seems that counting any of these contents as semantic would result in a view according to which semantic content has an essential role to play in the account of communication. In other words, each of them would count as philosophically interesting in the relevant sense, and (CD_{AC}) would not rule out any of them. So, what, more precisely, does it rule out?

Well, one thing that does not figure in the above account of communication is a notion of objective semantic content that transcends the audience's content and the intended content. Of course, what was given above is little

¹⁹ This is basically the 'classical' view of communicative success defended in Pagin (2008).

more than a sketch of an account, and many details need to be filled out, but it does not seem at all obvious that the introduction of an objective notion of semantic content is in any way mandatory. Rather, what is needed is a systematic account of how interlocutors manage to coordinate their interpretations when they do, and what goes wrong when they do not. Providing such an account would go far beyond the scope of this paper, but it is worth pointing out that the very idea of some third objective content between the two subjective contents has already been questioned in the philosophical literature on reference and communication. For instance, Stephen Neale (2007, 359–360n) argues that ‘[i]t is a mistake to think of “what is referred to” as some third thing upon which [the two subjective notions] are supposed to converge.’ What is of interest—and what, according to Neale, gives rise to the talk of ‘reference’—is the potential for coincidence between the subjective notions. Giving due consideration to this potential does not require that we posit a third, objective notion of semantic content.

It may still seem that (CD_{AC}) does not take us far enough, and that we need to come up with further criteria in order to decide on a metasemantics for indexicals and demonstratives. After all, since neither intentionalism nor the audience view is ruled out by (CD_{AC}) , we seem to end up with two rival theories left on the table. But do we really need to construe them as rivals?

An alternative approach would be to adopt an ecumenical view, according to which several context-indices—and thus several semantic contents—could pertain to one and the same utterance. On the conception of semantic content that comes with an approach of this kind, several semantic contents—the speaker’s and the audience’s—may pertain to one single utterance, and they may all count as semantic in that they result from plugging the relevant inputs—i.e. ordered pairs of sentences and context-indices—into the same (Kaplanian) semantic theory. Divergences between these different contents may be cashed out in terms of different perspectives of interlocutors sharing a language; whenever there is a divergence between speaker’s content and audience’s content, it can be traced to a divergence in what context-index pertains to the utterance from their respective perspective. Let us take a quick look at how a view of this kind fits with an account of communication of the kind suggested above.

If we take the semantics to model a certain aspect of the language users’ knowledge or competence, we can see that both the intended content and the audience’s content could be thought of as the result of applying a shared semantic theory to an utterance. Indeed, the assumption that the speaker and audience share this knowledge explains how they manage to coordinate their assignments of contents, and thus grasp the contents of utterances which they have never uttered or encountered before. Given that the speaker and audience

share a language (and they know, or at least believe this), the speaker's choice of a sentence S in trying to convey a certain content will depend on her semantic theory (the theory representing her semantic knowledge) and her conception of the utterance situation, as captured in the intended context-index $C1$.²⁰ The audience's interpretation of S will depend on their semantic theory together with their conception of the utterance situation, as captured in the context-index $C2$. Applying the shared semantics to the sentence-context pair $(S,C1)$ would yield the intended content, and applying the shared semantics to $(S,C2)$ would yield the audience's content. If $C1=C2$, their assignments of semantic content will converge, and communication will succeed (with respect to the semantic content). If $C1\neq C2$, their assignments of semantic content will diverge, and communication (with respect to the semantic content) will fail.

The ecumenical approach satisfies (CD_{AC}) , since both the speaker's and the audience's (semantic) content has a substantial role to play in the account of communication. Moreover, if we were to accept a view of this kind the conflict between intentionalism and the audience view of indexical reference would dissolve, and this would mean that the pressure to find further criteria by which to rule any of them out would decrease. This is not to say that there are no further constraints that need to be met by an adequate theory of indexical reference. I have focused on (CD) since it occupies a central place in the recent debate and is more or less explicitly endorsed under various interpretations by proponents of various theories. As regards the ecumenical approach suggested, it is not my purpose here to provide an airtight case for it. I merely put it forward as an alternative worth considering, as part of fulfilling the overarching aim of shedding light on the role that (CD) may play in theorising about indexical reference.

Nonetheless, I would like to end this part of the paper by briefly commenting on a potential objection to the ecumenical subjectivist view, namely that it does not seem to leave room for objective truth-conditions. This raises the issue of what we want the semantic (and metasemantic) part of a theory of indexical language to do. I am inclined to regard the most central task to be that of contributing to an account of how we communicate, and thus I think that the focus on (CD) under my preferred interpretation (CD_{AC}) is well motivated. However, one may feel that unless the theory also accounts for the objective truth-conditions of indexical utterances, something important will be missing. In response to this, I would like to reemphasize the point made

²⁰ This formulation is not to be taken as implying that the speaker has intentions concerning the context-index. Rather, the speaker's intentions, or more generally, her mental states, determine the context-index.

above, namely that the feeling that there is some kind of objective content that transcends the intended content and the audience's content might be explained in terms of the potential for coincidence between the subjective contents. Such an explanation could be invoked in order to debunk the intuition that there is some third thing on which speaker and audience converges when things go well, and fails to converge on when something goes wrong.²¹ To be sure, many details remain to be filled in, but this brief indication of how a reply might look will have to do for now.

3. Methodological Remarks

In the recent literature on indexical reference, a lot of the discussion has focused on cases involving written and recorded messages. So far, I have not said anything about these cases, or the intuitions about them that various authors have reported and invoked in order to argue for their preferred theory (or against its rivals). This is not an oversight, but rather a consequence of my methodological preferences. Rather than spending more ink and effort on intuitions about cases, I prefer to focus on arguments based on more fundamental theoretical ideas about the role of semantics and resulting demands on a philosophically interesting notion of semantic content. In this section, I explain the motivation behind this preference.

A fundamental problem with the method of cases as applied in the debate on indexical reference is that it is questionable whether all the intuitions appealed to really track semantic content. In order to get around this problem we would need some way of singling out the semantically relevant intuitions, as it were (cf. Cohen 2013, 9). But how could we single out the class of semantically relevant intuitions without somehow relying on a previous idea about what kind of features are relevant, or other theoretical criteria concerning how the distinction between semantics and pragmatics is to be drawn? And if we had already agreed on such criteria, why would we need to appeal to intuitions about cases to which the theories are to be applied? Insofar as our theoretical criteria rule out certain kinds of factors, these very same criteria will immediately rule out theories that appeal to factors of these kinds. We could also test the theories against specific cases by comparing the results of applying the different theories with the results of applying the criteria. Either way, the intuitions would simply drop out of the picture. So, it seems that once the appropriate criteria for singling out the semantically relevant

²¹ This is more or less what Neale (2007, 359–360n) suggests, and adds that ‘it is only a form of linguistic bewitchment that makes referring appear more basic than intending to refer.’

intuitions are in place, we no longer need to invoke intuitions about contents of indexicals in particular cases.

This does not mean that we have no use at all for intuitions, or that we cannot use intuitive concepts (like our ordinary notion of what is said) as starting points. However, there is a limit to what we can reasonably expect to accomplish by appealing to intuitions about cases in theorising about natural language, and there will (in many cases at least) come a point when the ordinary notions need to be refined for theoretical purposes. Clearly, how we should proceed when we reach this point is not something that could itself be settled on the basis of intuitions. For instance, consider our ordinary notion of what is said. This notion is not univocal, and depending on which aspect of it we focus on, we can generate intuitions that point in quite different directions. As John Perry (2007, 530) has pointed out, there is both a ‘psychological’ and a ‘forensic’ pressure on what is said. When our purpose is to understand the speaker in the sense of finding out what she intended to refer to, we will be more inclined to give in to the psychological pressure, and this will tend to generate an intuition that supports intentionalism. But sometimes we are more interested in distributing responsibility. For instance, we may want to settle who is to blame for the unfortunate consequences of a certain communicative misunderstanding. In such a setting, the forensic aspect will be raised to salience, and this will tend to generate an intuition that supports an audience-centred view.

I will conclude this section by illustrating these points with an example from the recent literature, namely a discussion between Christopher Gauker and Martin Montminy concerning the following case:

Suppose that Harry and Sally are at a department store and Harry is trying on ties. Harry has wrapped a garish pink-and-green tie around his neck and is looking at himself in a mirror. Sally is standing next to the mirror gazing toward the tie around Harry’s neck and says, “That matches your new jacket.” As a matter of fact, Sally has been contemplating in thought the tie that Harry tried on two ties back. At first she thought she did not like it, but then it occurred to her that it would look good with Harry’s new jacket. We can even suppose that in saying “that” what she intended to refer to was the tie two ties back. (Gauker 2008, 363)

Here is what Gauker says about this case:²²

²² The passages cited here form part of a more elaborate argument against the intentionalist view, which I have discussed and criticized elsewhere. For details, see [reference suppressed].

[U]nder the circumstances, Harry is in no position to realize that the tie she intended to refer to was the tie two ties back and therefore is in no position to take Sally's intention into account in identifying the reference of her demonstrative "that". The only thing one could reasonably expect Sally's demonstrative "that" to refer to is the pink-and-green tie around Harry's neck. So if we said that the referent of Sally's demonstrative was the tie she intended to refer to, we could not maintain that the proposition her utterance expressed was a proposition that Harry could assign to it using a method of interpretation that he could reliably employ on the basis of features of the situation that he could normally be aware of. Instead, we should say that the reference of her demonstrative was the pink-and-green tie around Harry's neck. (Gauker 2008, 363)

Here is what Montminy says about this case, and about Gauker's reaction to it:

I disagree with Gauker's claim that the referent of Sally's demonstrative is the tie around Harry's neck. My intuition is rather that Sally's utterance of 'that' refers to the tie that Harry tried on two ties back, since that is what she intended to refer to. Harry is, of course, in no position to figure out what Sally is referring to, and may well reasonably think that she is talking about the tie he is currently trying on. The intuition invoked by Gauker thus concerns the interpretation Harry may legitimately take to be the correct one rather than the correct interpretation. (Montminy 2010, 2912)

What we see here is two authors reporting different reactions to this case, each of which lends support to their own theory. Moreover, it seems rather clear that each of them has some underlying idea about what makes something count as the (semantic) referent. They do not simply report their intuitions about the case, but they also try to show that their own intuition is semantically relevant. In fact, Montminy goes on to claim that his own reaction, and the view that it supports, can be backed up by considerations about what is said:

Suppose that later on in the day, Sally and Harry are having this conversation:

Harry: I decided to buy the pink-and-green tie because you said it matches my new jacket.

Sally: I never said that. I was talking about the yellow tie, which you tried on two ties before the pink-and-green one.

It would be odd for Harry to reply, 'Well, I now understand that you were *trying* to say that the yellow tie matches my new jacket; but what you *actually* said was that the pink-and-green tie matches my new jacket.' In other words, it would seem unreasonable for Harry to insist that when

Sally said ‘That matches your new jacket,’ ‘that’ actually referred to the pink-and-green tie, despite Sally’s intention to refer to the yellow one. The right thing for Harry to do is to concede that he misunderstood Sally’s assertion, even though, he may add, he was quite justified in believing that her utterance concerned the pink-and-green tie. Cases of communication breakdowns, and how such cases are generally thought to be resolvable, better support the intentionalist picture. (Montminy 2010, 2913)

Montminy’s scenario lifts the psychological aspect of the ordinary notion of what is said to salience, and thus tends to make us more inclined to share Montminy’s own reaction. However, if we consider another afternoon scenario, like the following, the effect is the opposite:

Harry: I decided to buy the pink-and-green tie because you said it matches my new jacket.

Sally: I never said that. I was talking about the yellow tie, which you tried on two ties before the pink-and-green one.

Harry: I don’t care which tie you really had in mind. I bought the pink-and-green one because of what you *said*. It’s all your fault!

The application of the notion of what is said does not seem any less felicitous here than in Montminy’s scenario, but here the forensic aspect is raised to salience, and thus we are more inclined to react in accordance with a audience-centred view.

What this shows is that we cannot settle which of these two conflicting intuitions we ought to take to be semantically relevant by appeal to our ordinary notion of what is said. This is arguably a point at which we need to refine our ordinary notion, and in order to get this right, we need to reflect on what sort of concept we need for our theoretical purposes. In a recent paper, Perry (2009) has suggested that what we need is ‘a concept very close to what is said, but one that seals off the forensic issues’ (192) and this leads him to a view according to which ‘reference is easy’ in the sense that one ‘can use a demonstrative to refer to anything [one] can think of’ (198), regardless of whether or not the audience is in a position to grasp the referent. On this sort of view, the psychological aspect is given theoretical priority, and the theoretical consideration underlying this move is presumably that one wants to preserve an intimate connection between the semantic content of an utterance and the mental state that motivates it (cf. Perry, 2007, 530).

This way of thinking about reference lends support to Montminy’s position, but one need not agree with Perry’s approach. For instance, Jeffrey King (*forthcoming*) has suggested that in order to secure a referent for a demonstrative,

one must meet a certain standard in making the intended referent available to the audience, and he also suggests that this standard should be taken to vary with what one can be held responsible for given what one knows about the audience. This concept of semantic content retains something of the forensic aspect of what is said, and King provides the following theoretical reason for accepting it:

If we are constructing a semantic theory for a language with demonstratives and we want to define the notion of *a use of a demonstrative having o as its semantic value in context c*, it seems reasonable to require in that definition that the speaker did what was *required for successful communication* with a demonstrative. (King, *forthcoming*)

On this view, reference is not so easy, since it requires more than just having something in mind and intending to refer to it. If we were to adopt King's approach instead of Perry's, we would have reasons to reject Montminy's position.

The point here is that we will not get any firm grip on cases like the one discussed by Gauker and Montminy unless we make up our minds about certain basic theoretical ideas. Although intuitions may serve as a useful guide at certain stages, there are limits to what we can reasonably expect to accomplish by merely appealing to intuitions in theorising about natural language. Indeed, which intuitions one considers as semantically relevant is very likely to be strongly influenced by one's commitments to theoretical ideas of this kind. What we should do, then, is to bring these ideas into focus, and try to evaluate them as best we can. In this paper I have tried to shed some light on a general idea that has played a prominent role in the debate on indexical reference, namely the communication desideratum.

4. Conclusion

I have argued that the objections against strong intentionalism considered above can be resisted, since the interpretations of the communication desideratum upon which they rely ((CD_{SC}) and (CD_{CI})) are questionable, especially from the point of view of strong intentionalism. Moreover, I have proposed an alternative interpretation, (CD_{AC}), which is fulfilled by strong intentionalism as well as the audience view, and suggested an approach on which these two subjectivist views need not be construed as rivals. Finally, I have argued that rather than trying to base our choice of theory on intuitions about cases, we should put more focus on theoretical constraints like the communication desideratum.

As we have seen, there is disagreement about such basic matters as well, and such disputes may turn out to be very difficult, or perhaps even impossible, to resolve by way of philosophical arguments. On the one hand, whether or not such pessimism is warranted remains an open question, and we should not expect ourselves to be in a position to answer it prior to a more thorough investigation. On the other hand, we should perhaps not hope for too much when it comes to providing a solid basis of consensus for theorising in this area. It may well be that philosophically interesting conclusions require philosophically controversially premises,²³ and that when it comes to the most basic issues, there is no steady foundation to be had.

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²³ Craig (1982, 564) raises such a suspicion about theories of meaning in general, and points out that if it were to be correct, this would have rather grave consequences for the idea that such theories have a fundamental status in philosophy.

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