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A problem for predicativism solved by predicativism

DELIA GRAFF FARA

Consider the following sentences:

(1)   In every race, the colt won;
(2)   In every race, John won.

John Hawthorne and David Manley (2012, 236) say that the difference between these two sentences raises a problem for Predicativism about names.[1] According to the currently more standard version of Predicativism about names, a bare singular name in argument position, like 'John' in (2), is embedded in (what I call) a *denuded definite description*, a definite description '$\varnothing_{the}$ John', where '$\varnothing_{the}$' is an unpronounced definite article. The problem is supposed to be that (1) permits a *covarying reading* that allows for different races to have been won by different colts, while (2) does not permit a covarying reading—it can be true only if there is a single John that won every race. But, the objection runs, if the name 'John' is really embedded in a denuded definite description '$\varnothing_{the}$ John', then the two sentences are structurally parallel and should not differ with respect to covariation. Appealing to Jason Stanley's 'Nominal Restriction' (the 2005 version), I show that the difference between the two sentences above not only does not raise a problem for Predicativism but is actually predicted by it.

Let me start out by making a different comparison:

(2)   In every race, John won;
(3)   In every race, the John won.

For an utterance of (2) to be meaningful, there must be a particular John being talked about. The truth of such an utterance requires that particular

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1   Other recent critics of Predicativism include Gail Leckie (2013), Robin Jeshion (2015a, b, c) and Anders Schoubye (no date).

John to have been in every race and requires that particular John to have won every race. But an utterance of sentence (3) can be meaningful even if there is no particular John being talked about. Its truth requires that in every race, the person *called* John in that race won that race. It could be a different John in each race, say John Terry in one race, John Burgess in another race, John Cooper in a third and so on. The difference between (1) and (2) is paralleled by that between (3) and (2). The sentence with the bare singular name 'John' does not permit a covarying reading while (1) and (3), the sentences with the overt definite article, both do.

Sentences like (3) are among those that motivate a predicativist view about names. Here are some other examples:

(4)   There are two Johns in my department;
(5)   Most Michaels have conservative parents;
(6)   Sarahs from Alaska are usually scary;
(7)   The Erin that I met yesterday is a primary-school teacher.

According to predicativists, names are not referring expressions but more like count-noun predicates such as 'student', 'hunter' and 'woman': they have a *predicate-type semantic value*. The answer to the question *what type of semantic value do predicates have?* may vary from theory to theory. Alternatives include sets of entities, functions from entities to truth values, functions from either situations or possible worlds to one or the other of these and properties.

In addition, it is part and parcel of Predicativism, as I use the term, that names, as predicates, are true of their bearers. Using double-bracket notation to represent the function from an expression to its semantic value and taking the semantic value of a predicate to be the set of entities it's true of, predicativists say:

(8)   For any name N, $[\![N]\!] = \{x : x \text{ has } N \text{ as a name}\}$.

So what does a predicativist say when a name occurs as a bare singular in argument position, as in the sentence 'Michael is happy'? Predicates are not of the right semantic type to combine with one another to yield a truth value: sets (or their type-$\langle e, t \rangle$ characteristic functions or functions from worlds to extensions, et cetera) do not semantically compose with each other. Predicates require *subjects*.

Predicativists propose that when a name appears as a bare singular in argument position, it is actually embedded in a determiner phrase with an unpronounced, or 'phonologically null', determiner. Now we have a choice point: what determiner is that? 'That'-predicativists say that the hidden determiner is a demonstrative.[2] 'The'-predicativists say that the hidden

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2   The first advocate of this view was Tyler Burge (1973). Subsequent defenders include Jennifer Hornsby (1976), Reinaldo Elugardo (2002) and Sarah Sawyer (2010).

determiner is the definite article.[3] (There is a third option that is not entirely implausible: a 'some'-predicativist would say that the hidden determiner is just a simple existential.[4])

'That'-predicativists might appear at first glance to be on better footing than 'The'-predicativists for two reasons. On the one hand, definite descriptions are often thought to require uniqueness. But most names, if predicates, would have multiple application since most names are shared by more than one thing. On the other hand, complex demonstratives seem better-suited to accommodate the singular reference effected by speakers when they use bare singular names in argument position. If the name 'John' in (2) were equivalent to the complex demonstrative '*that* John', that would explain why an utterance of the sentence could be meaningful only if there were a particular John—*that* John—being referred to.

But 'The'-predicativists, of which I am one, can respond to both points. Definite descriptions occur often (if not most often) as incomplete definite descriptions, ones that embed predicates with multiple application. Granted that, there is no problem if the denuded definite descriptions that embed *names* are incomplete. Furthermore, with respect to the second point, definite descriptions—especially incomplete ones—are easily used by speakers to refer to particular things. I say to you after a party at my house,

(9)   Three guests outstayed their welcome at the party.

There were many parties that took place last night. But still, I am talking about a particular party. I am using the incomplete definite description in order to refer to that party. My usage bears two of the main hallmarks of reference: modal and temporal rigidity. Modal rigidity: when I say to you this morning,

(10)   People might have left the party by midnight.

I am still talking about that very same party. Whether there is a possible world in which there is some *other* party that empties out by midnight is irrelevant to the truth of what I say in (10). I myself might well have had some *different* party last night, at which everyone got bored and left early, but still, that would not suffice to make (10) true. (We could of course haggle over the identity conditions for parties, but that's neither here nor there.)

Temporal rigidity: when I said to you yesterday before the party,

(11)   I'm guessing that everyone will leave the party early.

I was talking about the very same party that I later described as having had three guests who stayed too late.

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3   The first advocate of this view was Clarence Sloat (1969). Subsequent defenders have included Francesco Orilia (2000), Paul Elbourne (2005), Ora Matushansky (2005, 2006b, 2008, 2014), Delia Fara (2011, 2015a, b) and Yu Izumi (2012).

4   Although it would be anachronistic to do so, one could say that Willard V. Quine (1960) was a 'some'-predicativist.

The same goes for Strawson's (1950) sentence:

(12)   The table is covered with books.

Someone who says this refers to a particular table with the incomplete description, and they do so rigidly—both modally and temporally.

So 'The'-predicativists needn't worry about the incompleteness of the denuded definite descriptions that embed names, and they can subsume the fact that incomplete definite descriptions with names are used by speakers to refer to particular things under the more general phenomenon of incomplete definite descriptions being used by speakers to refer to particular things.

So why do I prefer 'The'-Predicativism to 'That'-Predicativism? A number of authors have argued specifically against 'That'-Predicativism: Higginbotham (1988), Segal (2001) and King (2006). Although I favour 'The'-Predicativism, I do not accept those arguments, but this is not the place to explain why. The main reason that I prefer 'The'-Predicativism to 'That'-Predicativism is that it affords an explanation of why names sometimes can and sometimes cannot occur with the definite article.[5]

Consider these sentences.

(13)   a.   Michael is teaching Metaphysics this year;
       b.   The ever-popular Michael is teaching Metaphysics this year;

(14)   a.   Ivan, who is on the roof, is howling;
       b.   The Ivan who is on the roof is howling;

In these pairs of examples we see that while the overt definite article is sometimes prohibited from showing up with names, sometimes it is required to do so. In the a. sentences, we get ungrammaticality if the null definite article is made overt (without being stressed). But in the b. sentences we get ungrammaticality if the overt definite article is made null. In order to uncover a general rule that governs when the definite article must or must not be overt when it occurs with a name, let's describe the differences between the a. and b. sentences in (13 and 14).

In (13a), the name is unmodified, while in (13b), the name is preceded by a modifying adjective. In (14a), the relative clause that follows the name is a nonrestrictive one, while in (14b), the relative clause that follows the name is a restrictive one. There is a general exception to be made here, though, concerning *stressed* definite articles.

(15)   A: My neighbour is married to John Terry;
       B: Well, MY neighbour is married to THE John Terry.

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5   Matushansky (2014) provides an extended and thorough argument to the effect that examples of modified names, like the b. sentences in (13 and 14) make for a conclusive case for Predicativism about names.

When a definite article is stressed it *can* show up overtly when it has a name as its sister.[6] I'm supposing that there's an ordinary John Terry known to both speakers of the sentences in (15). Speaker A means that her neighbour is married to that ordinary John Terry. But then speaker B comes along and says that *his* neighbour is married to *the* John Terry, meaning not just the ordinary John Terry known to both of them, but John Terry the beleaguered football star. Here, if an unstressed but overt definite article is added to (15a) or if the overt and stressed definite article in (15b) is destressed, ungrammaticality results.

So here is a disjunctive statement of the constraint that governs when the definite article is required to occur as null when it combines with a name. I will shortly replace it with a systematic one.

> **Disjunctive generalization concerning '$\emptyset_{the}$':** The definite article will appear as null before names, except when it is heavily stressed or when the names are preceded by modifiers or followed by restrictive modifiers.[7]

I readily admit that the facts are not so simple as they are presented here and that more discussion would be needed to fully make the case, but for the purposes of this short essay, a general indication of the thesis and the arguments for it should suffice.[8]
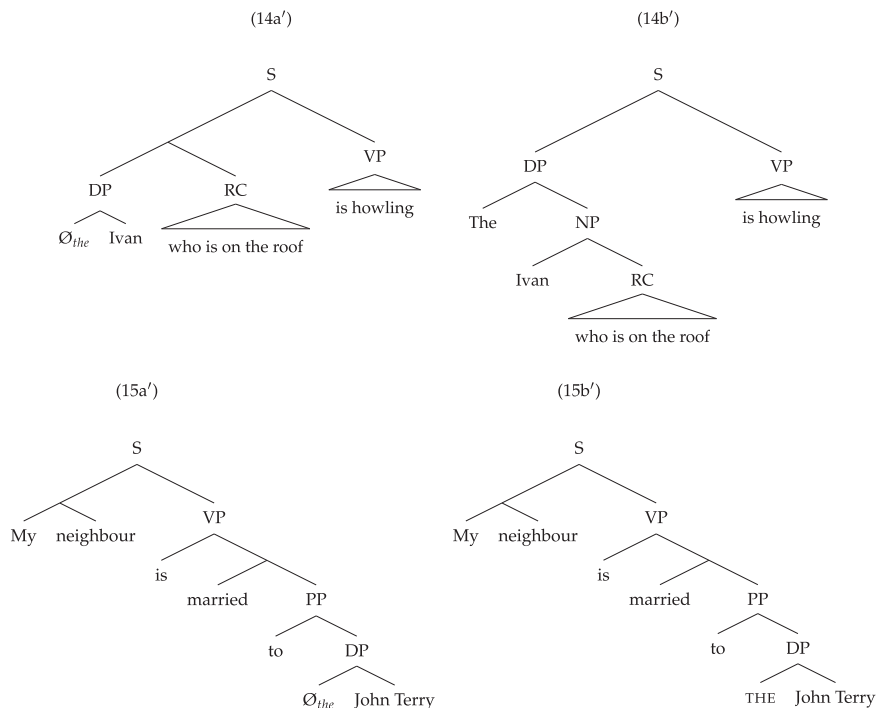
If we look at the syntactic structures for the sentences in (13–15), we can uncover a smooth generalization—far more systematic than the disjunctive one above—for when a name can occur embedded in a definite description with an overt definite article.

(13a′)   (13b′)

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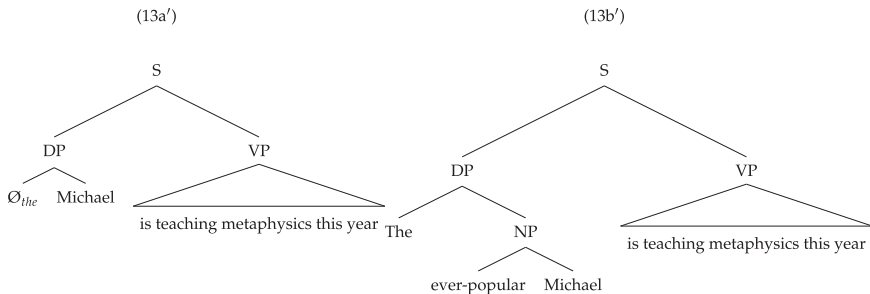
6   Perhaps the stress on the definite article is used to suggest a unique importance, relative to the other satisfiers of its complement, of the thing that's intended to be talked about.

7   This is almost a direct paraphrase from Sloat (1969: 28). It was Sloat who first noticed the systematicity of the sorts of contrasts displayed in (13–15). He did not, however, propose any more systematic analysis than the disjunctive one just given. I do follow Sloat, though, in appealing to such examples to motivate and confirm 'The'-Predicativism, but my analysis of the contrasts departs significantly from his as well as from the one other one that I know of, given by Matushansky (2006a, b).

8   See Fara (2015b) for extended discussion and defence of the syntactic claims about '$\emptyset_{the}$'.

(14a′)

```
              S
           /     \
         /         VP
       /          /  \
     DP    RC    is howling
    /  \    \
 Ø_the Ivan  who is on the roof
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(14b′)

```
              S
           /     \
         DP         VP
        /  \       /  \
      The   NP    is howling
           /  \
        Ivan   RC
                \
              who is on the roof
```

(15a′)

```
             S
          /     \
        /         VP
    My neighbour  / \
               is    \
                  married  PP
                          /  \
                        to    DP
                             /  \
                         Ø_the  John Terry
```

(15b′)

```
             S
          /     \
        /         VP
    My neighbour  / \
               is    \
                  married  PP
                          /  \
                        to    DP
                             /  \
                          THE   John Terry
```

The systematic generalization that emerges can be stated as the following constraint.

> **Where 'Ø_the':** When a name occurs in a definite description, the definite article must be unpronounced when the name is its structural sister, unless the definite article is stressed.[9]

We can think of the rule in this way: there has to be a contraction between the definite article and a name when they are syntactically next to each other, in the sense of being syntactic sisters. What justifies the exception for *stressed* definite articles? Easy. It's not possible to stress a word without pronouncing it. This is similar to there being a preference for contracting the auxiliary verb 'have' with 'not', when 'not' immediately follows, unless the 'not' is stressed, in which case it cannot be contracted. Compare 'I haven't seen your book' with 'I have NOT seen your book'. With the first sentence it sounds like you've asked me to help you find your book, while with the second sentence it

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9 Obviously, this rule is specific to English. In a number of natural languages, definite articles before unmodified singular names can, at least sometimes, get pronounced. Examples are Portuguese, Modern Greek, French, German, Italian and Spanish. (See Matushansky (2006b, 2008) for extensive cross-linguistic and intralinguistic discussion of the different strictures in different languages on the occurrence of an overt definite article with unmodified singular names.)

sounds like you've accused me of moving or hiding your book. As with the definite article, it is not possible to put stress on 'not' while still contracting it—'I haveN'T see your book' is not a sentence of English.

Let's now return to my contrasting sentences (2) and (3).

(2) In every race, John won;
(3) In every race, the John won.

It looks at face value as if (3) would be ungrammatical if my account were correct since it looks at face value as if in (3), 'the' and the name 'John' are syntactic sisters. So either my generalization is incorrect or things are not as they seem at face value. I claim that it is the latter.

One way to account for the covariation in (3) is to posit a bindable variable as part of a *nominal restriction* on the name. This is what Jason Stanley and Zoltán Szabó do as part of their argument that quantifier domain restriction is to be accounted for as *nominal restriction* (Stanley and Szabó 2000).[10] This is one of their leading examples:

(16) In every room in John's house, every bottle is in the corner.

This sentence obviously would not be used to mean that in every room in John's house every bottle in existence is in the corner. Nor would it be used to mean even that in every room in John's house, every bottle in his house in the corner. Rather, it would be used to mean that in every room in John's house, every bottle *in that room* is in the corner. The bottles *covary* with the room. Stanley and Szabó account for this by positing a nominal restriction that's syntactically attached to the noun 'bottle' and that contains a variable bound by a higher quantifier expression. In other words, they account for the co-variation as variable binding into a covert nominal restriction.

(17) In every room x in John's house, every bottle [in x] is in the corner [of x].

Here I use square brackets to indicate unpronounced material.

Now, if we accounted for the covariation in (3) (as well as in (1)) in the same way, then we can understand, given my generalization concerning where we have '$\varnothing_{the}$', why we get a covarying interpretation with (3) but not (2).

Now, if a covert nominal restriction containing a variable that's bound from without is syntactically attached to 'John', then given the **Where** '$\varnothing_{the}$' constraint, the definite article is required to be overt. But without the nominal restriction (or any other kind of modification), the definite article, if un-stressed, is required to be null.

(1′) In every race x, the colt [in x] won [x].
(2′) In every race [x], $\varnothing_{the}$ John won [x].

10 See also Stanley (2000, 2002, 2005).

(3′) In every race x, the John [in x] won [x].

So the syntactic difference between the subject of (2′) and that of (3′) can be represented as follows:
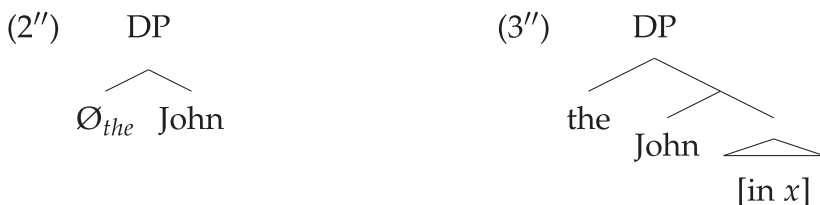
In (2″), the definite article has the name 'John' as its sister and so must appear as $\varnothing_{the}$. But in (3″), the definite article does not have the name as its sister but rather a name that's modified by a restrictive relative clause, albeit a covert one, and so must appear as overt 'the'.

For further confirmation of my explanation, note how the following sentences differ from their counterparts in (1–3). Here the quantifier phrase 'every race' no longer has the subject expressions in its scope and so cannot bind any variables in those subjects.

(18) The colt won in every race;
      (COVARYING READING IS POSSIBLE, BUT MARGINAL)

(19) John won in every race;
      (COVARYING READING IS NOT POSSIBLE)

(20) ?? The John won in every race.
      (ONLY THE COVARYING READING IS POSSIBLE, BUT IT IS MARGINAL)

We find that (18) does not easily receive the covarying reading.[11] Regarding (19), as before, there is no covarying reading since 'John' does not occur with an overt definite article, there. The key sentence now is the ungrammatical (20) (ungrammatical if not covarying, which is a marginal interpretation for the sentence). Its ungrammaticality is straightforwardly explained by my view. Since the name is no longer in the scope of a variable binder, it does not have a variable-containing nominal restriction and is therefore the syntactic sister of the definite article, which therefore, by my **Where** '$\varnothing_{the}$' rule, must not be pronounced.[12] So, to wrap up, the putative problem for Predicativism as raised by Hawthorne and Manley was why (1) but not

11 This is an example of what's known as 'weak crossover': *crossover* because in order to get the covarying reading, the quantifier phrase 'every race' has to move out of its prepositional phrase and cross over the subject in order to get its variable in its scope; *weak* because the crossed-over reading is not impossible, but it is more or less marginal.

12 Note also that while a weak-crossover reading might be possible for (20), it is definitely not possible for (19).

(2) could have a covarying interpretation. The proponents of nominal restriction say that in order for the definite descriptions 'the colt' and 'the John' to have a covarying interpretation, they must be modified by a nominal restriction containing a variable available to be bound by the higher quantifier expression, in this case 'every race x'. Appealing to nominal restriction, the predicativist explains Hawthorne and Manley's contrast by saying that we cannot get a covarying interpretation of (2) or (3) unless there is a nominal restriction on the name that contains a variable that's available to be bound by a higher quantifier. But, given the **Where** '$\emptyset_{the}$' constraint, there cannot be a nominal restriction modifying the name 'John' in (2) since if there were, the definite article could not appear as null. Meanwhile, turning to my contrast between (2) and (3), the reason that (3) gets a covarying interpretation is that the presence of an unstressed overt definite article requires that there be some modifier attached to the name 'John'—a covert modifier, given that there is no overt one. One immediate corollary is that Stanley and Szabo's nominal restrictions do indeed have a syntactic reality, as they claim, since otherwise its presence in (3″) would not force an overt pronunciation of the definite article. Another corollary is that not only do these restrictions have a syntactic reality, they must also occupy their own syntactic node. That view had been explicitly rejected by Stanley and Szabo (2000), who claimed that the nominal restrictions "cohabited" a node with the noun that they restrict. But it was later advocated specifically in solo work by Stanley (2005).

The upshot is that appeal to Stanley's (2005) version of *nominal restriction*, combined with 'The'-Predicativism, in particular, along with my supplementary **Where** '$\emptyset_{the}$' constraint, provides a clean explanation of the contrasts in our two pairs of sentences. In this way, the two theories confirm one another; they are mutually reinforcing. Each works better with the other.[13]

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