

Saying a Bundle: Meaning, Intention, and Underdetermination

Abstract

People often speak loosely, uttering sentences that are plainly false on their most strict interpretation. Understanding presents the problem of *underdetermination*: there is often no unique interpretation that captures what they meant. Focusing on the case of incomplete definite descriptions, this paper suggests that speakers often mean *bundles* of propositions. When a speaker means a bundle, their audience can know what they mean by deriving any one of its members. Rather than posing a problem for the interpretation of loose talk, the underdetermination of a uniquely correct interpretation allows for various ways in which the audience can grasp the speaker's meaning.

1 Underdetermination Arguments

At least since Grice (1989) it has been commonplace to distinguish between what a speaker *means* by an utterance and what they *say*, where only the latter is characterised by a close relation to the words uttered. By uttering 'I am tired' I might mean both that I am tired and that I want to leave the restaurant. The first proposition is said, while the second is meant without being said. There may be many propositions that are meant without being said. In the example above, I might further mean that we should pay our bill. It is often assumed, however, that a single utterance can be used to say at most one proposition. The presence of this assumption can be detected in regular reference in the literature to '*the* proposition said' or '*the* proposition expressed'. The assumption is also witnessed by the proliferation of *underdetermination arguments*. These arguments assume that successful communication is inexplicable when there is no way for the audience to identify a unique proposition said and leverage this assumption to reject a variety of linguistic and philosophical theses.¹

This paper focuses on Stephen Schiffer's appeal to underdetermination—the *meaning-intention problem*—and, in particular, his 1995 argument against the hidden-indexical theory of definite descriptions, which contains one of Schiffer's most explicit presentations of the problem.² According to the hidden-indexical

¹Donnellan (1968), Wettstein (1981), Blackburn (1988), and Reimer (1992) reject various analyses of incomplete definite descriptions. Stanley and Szabó (2000) reject an ellipsis view of quantifier domain restriction. Borg (2002) rejects descriptive analyses of deferred demonstrative. Clapp (2002) denies that truth-conditions are determined compositionally. Buchanan and Ostertag (2005) and Buchanan (2010, 2012) deny that speakers mean propositions by their utterances.

²Schiffer (1981, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995) deploys the meaning-intention problem to target various other views. These arguments and those in the footnote above, are subject to the

theory, a literal speaker who utters a sentence of the form ‘The F is G ’ thereby says a proposition of the form *the F and H is G* , where the property H is drawn from the conversational context. Schiffer argues that literal speakers are often unable to say any proposition of this form, however, as there are usually a number of equally-viable candidates for the completing property H . Given a context where we know that the only table in my room is also the only table in my home, my utterance of ‘The table is cluttered’ might have been used to say either that the table *in my room* is cluttered or that the table *in my home* is cluttered. If I say one of these propositions to the exclusion of the other, you cannot know which proposition I have said. Anyone who understands my utterance must be able to know what proposition (if any) I have said. As you can clearly understand my utterance, I cannot have said either proposition.

While Schiffer is correct that there is often no unique proposition said by an utterance of a definite description, it does not follow that the speaker says no proposition at all. According to the account developed here, speakers regularly say many propositions, each of which bears an interesting relation to the others, which I term *bundling*. In the example above, our common knowledge bundles the proposition that the table in my room is cluttered with the proposition that the table in my home is cluttered. When someone says a bundle of propositions, their audience can identify the whole bundle by identifying any one of its members. While there are many completing properties available in the context, each property offers you a different way to identify the same bundle of propositions and so understand my utterance.

The following section presents the hidden-indexical theory and the meaning-intention problem in further detail. Section three considers two interpretations of speech report data due to Schiffer (1995) and Buchanan and Ostertag (2005). The fourth section introduces the notion of *bundling*, deploys the notion to respond to the meaning-intention problem, and compares this response to its competitors. The fifth section shows how bundling can be leveraged to provide a novel account of the distinction between referential and attributive uses of definite descriptions. The sixth section closes by considering a potential revenge problem.

2 The Meaning-Intention Problem

2.1 The Hidden-Indexical Theory of Descriptions

According to Russell’s analysis, an utterance of the form ‘The F is G ’ is true if and only if there is one and only one F and everything F is G .³ Against this analysis, Strawson (1950) poses the problem of incomplete descriptions. Speakers often use ‘The F ’ even when there is clearly more than one F in existence, but do not thereby commit themselves to the false proposition that there is one and only one F . By an utterance of ‘The table is cluttered’, for example, one does not mean that there is only one table in existence.

The standard Russellian response is to emphasise the role of context in interpretation. Audiences must often appeal to context beyond the sentence

comments made here. I engage with Buchanan, Clapp, and Stanley and Szabó in [redacted for anonymous review].

³For Russell’s original presentation of the analysis, see Russell (1905). A more formal presentation is given in Whitehead and Russell (1910-13, *14)

uttered in order to know what speakers mean, in this case by identifying an additional property to uniquely identify the table in question. An example of this response is Schiffer’s (1995) *naive hidden-indexical theory of definite descriptions* (though we will drop the ‘naive’ for the most part) according to which utterances of the form ‘The F is G ’ are governed by the following meaning-rule:

\mathcal{R} : Utter ‘The F is G ’ only if there is a property H such that you mean that the F and H is G .⁴

The occurrence of ‘the F and H is G ’ in \mathcal{R} is stipulated to be true if and only if there is one and only one thing that is F and H , and everything F and H is also G . Given that H might be the identical to F , \mathcal{R} allows speakers to mean precisely the proposition that Russell’s analysis associated with the sentence they utter, while also allowing them to mean a proposition that Russell’s analysis would associate with a more complex sentence. Schiffer’s favoured notion of *saying* is characterised as follows:

Saying: “to say that p was *said/stated* in the utterance of a sentence is to say, first, that the speaker meant p in uttering the sentence, and, second, that the meaning of the sentence requires the literal speaker to mean some proposition of a type to which p conforms” (Schiffer, 1995, 119-20).

A speaker who utters a sentence of the form ‘The F is G ’, thereby meaning that the F and H is G , says that the F and H is G .⁵

2.2 The Meaning-Intention Problem

Against the hidden-indexical theory, Schiffer (1995, 114-15) argues that it is regularly impossible for speakers to comply with \mathcal{R} . The problem is illustrated by the following case. Suppose that you and I are awaiting a lecture by Professor Ferdinand Pergola. When the Professor stumbles up to the podium, you say to me ‘The guy’s drunk’. Clearly, you do not mean that there is one and only one guy and that guy is drunk.⁶ According to \mathcal{R} , there must be some additional property H such that you mean that *the H guy is drunk*. The problem arises because it is common ground that Pergola uniquely satisfies the following descriptions.

d_1 : ‘the person we are waiting to hear’

d_2 : ‘the author of Smells and Tickers’

⁴We might question, as does an anonymous reviewer, whether this theory of definite descriptions is appropriately described as ‘indexical’. Schiffer does not suggest that the logical form of a definite description involves any indexical expressions (compare his presentation of the hidden-indexical theory of belief reports at Schiffer (1995, 109)). Rather, Schiffer (1995, 114) takes the theory to be *indexical* “because different completing descriptions can be meant on different occasions of utterance.” I will defer to Schiffer’s terminology in what follows.

⁵This definition of *saying/stating* is clearly inspired by Grice (1989, 87), who also assumes that saying that p entails meaning that p . As noted by an anonymous reviewer, however, this notion conflicts with some interpretations of Grice which assume that speakers say at most one proposition. Schiffer’s notion is compatible with the speaker saying multiple propositions.

⁶This is clear because we recognise that the world contains more than one guy. If we assumed that the world contained a unique guy, you could be interpreted as meaning that the world’s unique guy is drunk. You might mean that, but of course it would remain false.

d_3 : ‘the person reputed to have solved the mind-body problem’

We will come to two formal conceptions of the common ground later. For now, it is sufficient to view the common ground as consisting of those propositions that are considered mutual knowledge for the purposes of our conversation and which each of us can legitimately assume in formulating and interpreting utterances.

Each description d_1 - d_3 delivers a distinct candidate for the completing property H and so a distinct candidate for the proposition said according to \mathcal{R} . From the modest list of descriptions above, we derive the following propositions.

p_1 : the guy we are waiting to hear is drunk

p_2 : the guy who authored Smells and Tickles is drunk

p_3 : the guy reputed to have solved the mind-body problem is drunk

Given this plurality of candidates for what is said, Schiffer argues that the speaker cannot comply with \mathcal{R} . I reprint Schiffer’s argument in full before regimentation:

“if the naive hidden-indexical theory of descriptions is correct, then there is some contextually-salient property H such that in uttering ‘The guy’s drunk’ you implicitly stated, and thus meant, *that the H guy was drunk*, where *the H guy* was one of those shared definite descriptions. Yet it is doubtful that you meant any such thing, for it is hard to see how you could have the meaning intentions such an act would require. Imagining myself as your audience, I do not see how I could have identified any one definite description, however complex, as *the one* that figured in the proposition you asserted. And yet, it would seem that I understood your utterance perfectly well, and it ought to be a consequence of any acceptable theory of meaning that if a speaker, speaking literally, meant p in uttering u , then one who understood his utterance perfectly well took him to have meant p in uttering u . It seems clear that in our example you *could not* mean what the naive theory requires you to mean, because no *one* of the numerous shared definite descriptions is sufficiently salient to make it mutually evident to us that you meant a proposition containing it.”

(Schiffer, 1995, 113-14) original italics.

I regiment the argument as follows.

1. “if the naive hidden-indexical theory of descriptions is correct, then . . . in uttering ‘The guy’s drunk’, you implicitly stated, and thus meant, [some proposition of the form] *that the H guy was drunk*”.
2. For all propositions p , “if a speaker, speaking literally, meant p in uttering u , then one who understood his utterance perfectly well took him to have meant p in uttering u .”⁷

⁷While Schiffer endorses a broadly Gricean view on which speaker-meaning involves a reflexive intention that is successful only if it is recognised, this premise ensures that the problem arises even for a less restricted view of speaker-meaning. Whether or not they intend to be understood, a speaker is understood only if their audience recognises their meaning.

3. You speak literally and I understand your utterance perfectly.⁸
4. For all propositions p , if you meant p by your utterance then I took you to have meant p by your utterance. (2,3)
5. I cannot take you to mean any one proposition of the form *that the H guy was drunk* because I cannot identify “any one definite description, however complex, as the *one* that figured in the proposition you asserted.”⁹
6. I can take you to mean at most one proposition of the form *that the H guy was drunk*.
7. I cannot take you to mean any proposition of the form *that the H guy is drunk*. (5,6)
8. In uttering ‘The guy’s drunk’, you meant no proposition of the form *that the H guy is drunk*. (4,7)
9. The naive hidden-indexical theory of descriptions is not correct. (1,8)

Premise 6, though not asserted explicitly, is clearly presupposed by Schiffer’s emphasised use of “*the one*” and “*no one*”. The focus on uniqueness is echoed by Buchanan and Ostertag (2005) whose response to the meaning-intention problem we will come to in the following section. In their ninth footnote, however, they recognise that “the issue is not really whether there is a *unique* completion but whether we can recognize the completion as having been intended by the speaker.” Ultimately, Buchanan and Ostertag choose to ignore this possibility on the grounds that “Typically, if a completion is intended, it is uniquely intended”, thereby siding with the widespread assumption that speakers usually say at most one proposition.

Schiffer (1995) ultimately suggests that you mean only the object-dependent proposition that Pergola is drunk, where my last use of ‘Pergola’ stands for the man himself, rather than any contingent description of him.¹⁰ For fans of the hidden-indexical theory, however, he suggests that a ‘non-naive’ version which

⁸I interpret ‘perfectly well’ as equivalent to ‘perfectly’. There is another interpretation of this phrase on which it is equivalent to ‘well enough’ but the second premise is very implausible on this interpretation. I can understand you well enough for our present purposes, even if I fail to grasp everything that you mean.

⁹Borg (2012, 135) has recently defended a view of indexicals like ‘this’ and ‘that’ on which they refer to whatever object the speaker intends. Audiences can understand speakers by thinking of the referent as *the actual object referred to by the speaker*, even if they have no other way of identifying the right object. We might deny premise 5 by suggesting that I can identify the proposition you mean as *the proposition of the form that the H guy is drunk that the speaker intends*. Two problems with this response. First, the suggestion makes it too easy to achieve understanding. I can identify the proposition in this way whether or not I understand the context in which you are speaking, but I cannot understand you perfectly if I don’t know that you are talking about the referent of d_1 - d_3 . A similar response to Borg’s account of indexicals is to be found in Michaelson (2013, 101). Second, there are other reasons to think that you mean no unique proposition of this form. Schiffer (1995, 120 and 2005, 1154-1157) points out that you might as well utter ‘He is drunk’ in the Pergola case—you’re meaning is equally well conveyed by either sentence—but there is little temptation to think that someone who utters ‘He is drunk’ must mean some unique proposition of the form *that the H guy is drunk*. See footnote 25 for further discussion. My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pointing me to Borg’s suggestion and Michaelson’s response.

¹⁰Though Schiffer (1995, 128-30) hints at a more radical theory.

allows that your meaning is somewhat indeterminate. While you did not determinately mean any one of the propositions p_1 - p_3 , Schiffer (1995, 115) suggests that you “*sort-of-meant*” each one of them. As we’ll see in Section 4, however, the fan of the hidden-indexical theory can retain determinate description-theoretic speaker-meaning in the face of the Pergola case.

3 Speech Reports and Speaker Meaning

3.1 Speech Reports

Buchanan and Ostertag (2005, 900-901) (henceforth B&O) note that you are naturally reported as having ‘meant that s_n ’ by your utterance of ‘The guy’s drunk’, for any of the sentences s_1 - s_3 , corresponding to the propositions p_1 - p_3 .¹¹

s_1 : ‘the guy we are waiting to hear is drunk’

s_2 : ‘the guy who authored Smells and Ticks is drunk’

s_3 : ‘the guy reputed to have solved the mind-body problem is drunk’

Taken at face value, these reports suggest that you meant each of the propositions p_1 - p_3 , though Schiffer and B&O suggest alternative interpretations of the data.

3.2 Object-Dependent Meaning

Schiffer (1995) suggests that we should understand s_1 - s_3 as expressing the same proposition in the context of these reports: the object-dependent proposition that Pergola is drunk.¹² This suggestion explains why it is peculiar to conjoin the speech reports above, as when I report you as having meant ‘that the guy we are waiting to hear is drunk and meant that the guy who authored Smells and Ticks is drunk’. According to Schiffer’s object-dependent interpretation, the second conjunct is superfluous, as both descriptions denote the same proposition. The account has difficulty, however, explaining why same the report is appropriate when used to report your utterance to a third party who doesn’t know that the guy we are waiting to hear is the author of Smells and Ticks. According to Schiffer’s analysis, one of the conjuncts remains superfluous. Any attempt to retreat to a descriptive analysis of the report causes problems because Schiffer’s denies that you meant any descriptive proposition by your utterance.

¹¹Strictly speaking, B&O says that the speaker might respond by uttering any of s_1 - s_3 if they were asked what they meant. I take it to be as plausible that they might respond by prefixing s_1 , s_2 , or s_3 with ‘I meant that’.

¹²This suggestion is not made explicit. Schiffer (1995, 120) explicitly claims that “If you ask the speaker what she meant in uttering “The guy is drunk”, you will not get a report that favours the description theory: the speaker will almost certainly offer up an object-dependent proposition involving Pergola, the intended referent of her utterance of “the guy””. Regarding a speaker who says ‘He is drunk’, however, Schiffer (1995, 125) argues that while “she might well say that she meant that the guest speaker was drunk, or that the guy staggering up to the podium was drunk . . . she would be using those descriptions to refer to Pergola; she would not be intending any “de dicto” readings of those self-ascriptive meaning reports wherein the that-clauses refer to description-theoretic propositions.”

Another problem with Schiffer’s account is its limited application. The object-dependence account is plausible when the speaker and audience have direct acquaintance with Pergola, as when we watch him stumble up to the podium. In such a context, we are perhaps not essentially interested in whether the guy who uniquely satisfies the descriptions d_1 - d_3 is drunk but in whether Pergola himself is drunk. Schiffer’s suggestion becomes far less appealing, however, when our only experience of Pergola is by description.¹³ Suppose that we are waiting for a lecturer with whom we associate each of the descriptions d_1 - d_3 but that we have no independent way of identifying the actual individual who satisfies these descriptions. Rumours trickle in that the lecturer, whoever they are, is drunk and will not attend. You say to me ‘The guy’s drunk’. This case is as much subject to the meaning-intention problem as the case in which Pergola is staggering in front of us, and it is appropriate to report you as having ‘meant that s_n ’ for each of the sentences above, but Schiffer’s object-dependent analysis is far less attractive. In this case, we *are* essentially interested in whether the individual uniquely denoted by d_1 - d_3 is drunk. Moreover, it is not clear that we can entertain the object-dependent proposition about Pergola when our only contact with him is by description.

3.3 S-Meaning

B&O (2005, 900-901) take the acceptability of different reports to indicate that no one report “perfectly captures [the speaker’s] intention . . . each presents a fallback proposition—something that [the speaker] does not recognize himself as having intended, but which he would unhesitatingly offer, were he asked to be more explicit.” Although the speaker has communicative intentions, B&O deny that these intentions are appropriately put in terms of speaker-meaning. They coin a new communicative attitude, termed “s-meaning” for *sloppy-meaning* (B&O 2005, 902). If the speaker means that p , then the speaker’s intentions are satisfied only if the audience takes the speaker to mean that p . If the speaker s-means that p , however, the speaker’s intentions may be satisfied even if the audience has no attitude whatsoever towards p . S-meaning is an intention towards a host of propositions at once, and the speaker’s intentions are satisfied as long as the audience adopts the correct attitude towards any one of them.

It isn’t entirely clear what B&O take the correct attitude to be. They rely heavily on the notion of *entertaining* a proposition. If you mean that p , however, you do not intend only that I entertain p ; you intend that I take you to mean that p . Your intentions have not been satisfied if p occurs to me out of the blue, without the recognition that you meant it.¹⁴ If you s-mean a number of propositions, it isn’t clear whether I must take you to mean one of these propositions (which you do not), or take you to s-mean one of those propositions (which requires the recognition that the proposition I entertain is one among many of the propositions that you s-mean), or take some other attitude entirely.

Despite this concern, I have little doubt that speakers are capable of something like s-meaning. B&O draw the stronger conclusion, however, that you are capable *only* of s-meaning in the Pergola case. This conclusion rests on acceptance of the meaning-intention problem, a key premise of which will be

¹³B&O (2005, 895) note a similar concern in arguing against a suggestion from Neale (2004).

¹⁴Though your intentions may be satisfied if you only meant (i.e. intended) me to believe that p . Meaning your audience to believe that p does not entail meaning that p .

undermined in the following section. B&O’s conclusion is not supported by the reporting data alone, as the very same evidence is available even when the speaker utters one of s_1 - s_3 . If, in the Pergola context, you utter ‘The person we are waiting to hear is drunk’, you may, if questioned, describe your meaning by saying ‘I meant that s_n ’, for any of the sentences s_1 - s_3 . If these reports alone support B&O’s response in the case of ‘The guy’s drunk’ then they support the same response in the cases of s_1 , s_2 , or s_3 . I take it as clear, however, that this evidence does not support that response in the latter cases, given the antecedent expectation that a speaker who utters one of the sentences s_1 - s_3 means the corresponding member of p_1 - p_3 .

Indeed, it isn’t entirely clear that the reporting data provides any support for the s-meaning account if the conclusion of the meaning-intention problem is undermined, as these reports are naturally interpreted as felicitous because they are true. According to B&O, however, these reports are strictly false. While I agree that the speaker who utters ‘The guy’s drunk’ exhibits some kind of sloppiness or indifference in their communicative intentions, we can account for this fact without denying that the speaker means a description-theoretic proposition by their utterance.

3.4 The Cognitive Burden Objection

The view presented in the following section will take these speech reports at face value, as evidence that you mean all of the propositions p_1 - p_3 . In order to understand you perfectly, I must therefore take you to mean each of these propositions. In many realistic situations, the speaker and their audience will share far more common knowledge than we specified in the Pergola case, leading to a significant increase in the description-theoretic propositions that the speaker means. This suggests a problem. If you mean a vast number of propositions, we might worry that it becomes impossible for me to understand you.

Consider a standard case of implicature in which the speaker means multiple propositions. You say ‘I am tired’, thereby meaning that you are tired and that you want to go to bed. According to a standard view, a rational reconstruction of your interpretive process may go something like this.¹⁵ First, I recognise that you mean that you are tired. Second, I recognise that your utterance would violate a conversational maxim unless you further meant that you want to go to bed. Thirdly, I take you to mean this additional proposition. The recognition that you mean both propositions takes more cognitive work than the recognition that you mean only the first, as indicated by the final two steps.

Taking this picture of implicature as a guide, we might conclude that more cognitive work is needed for the audience to take the speaker to mean all of the propositions p_1 - p_3 than would be required if the audience took the speaker to mean just one of these propositions. Given the sheer number of such propositions available in many realistic contexts, we may worry that understanding would require more work than interpreters are capable of.

This cognitive burden objection fails to take into account the *bundling* of the propositions that the speaker means. Given the assumption that all the descriptions d_1 - d_3 are co-denoting, the propositions p_1 - p_3 are bundled. In order to understand you, I needn’t derive each of these propositions individually, as

¹⁵Cf. (Grice, 1989, 31).

in the case of implicature. I need only identify any one member of the bundle, as is explained in the following section.

4 Bundling Meaning

4.1 Speaker-Meaning as an Effect on the Common Ground

The meaning-intention problem relies on a one-sided appeal to the common ground of our conversation. While our mutual knowledge is used to multiply the propositions that you might mean, the argument fails to consider the effect that these propositions will have on that same body of knowledge. Your primary intention is not to say a particular proposition but to make a certain contribution to the common ground of the conversation. It is mutually evident in our conversation that the person we are waiting to hear is the author of Smells and Tickles and the person reputed to have solved the mind-body problem; that the descriptions d_1 - d_3 are co-denoting. There is therefore no way for me to select one of the propositions p_1 - p_3 as the unique proposition said. But given the same common knowledge the propositions p_1 - p_3 all make the same contribution to the common ground. On the approach defended here, you mean a *bundle* of propositions, where every member of the bundle captures the contribution you intend to make to the common ground. You mean each of the propositions p_1 - p_3 and so mean some proposition of the form required by \mathcal{R} .

First, consider the case in which you utter s_1 . Being a definite description, use of the sentence is governed by \mathcal{R} . As the description is complete, I can take you to mean that p_1 and, if I accept your utterance, will treat this proposition as common ground. We move from a conversation in which it is not common ground that p_1 to a conversation in which it is common ground that p_1 . Given that it is already common ground that the descriptions d_1 - d_3 are co-denoting, however, the addition of p_1 does not exhaust the effect of your utterance on the common ground: your utterance also adds p_2 and p_3 to the common ground. The alternative is that we enter a peculiarly fractured conversation in which we are permitted to assume that the person we are waiting to hear is drunk, permitted to assume that the person we are waiting to hear is the author of Smells and Tickles, and yet not permitted to assume that the author of Smells and Tickles is drunk.

Given the existing common ground, the propositions p_1 - p_3 are, as I will say, *bundled*: by adding any one of them to the common ground, we thereby add all of them to the common ground.¹⁶ By your utterance of s_1 , you mean all of the propositions that are bundled with the proposition that you say, including p_1 , p_2 , and p_3 . Note that this bundling does not essentially depend on the assumption that the common ground is closed under entailment, but only on the weaker assumption that the common ground is closed under the substitution of descriptions when it is common ground that those descriptions pick out the same object. If it is common ground that ‘the F ’ and ‘the H ’ are co-denoting, it is common ground that the F is G if and only if it is common ground that the

¹⁶The notion of *bundling* at work here is distinct from the notion of *lumping* found in Kratzer (1989). While bundling is a symmetrical relation, lumping is not. The proposition that every tree in your orchard is laden with wonderful golden apples lumps the proposition that *this particular tree* is laden with wonderful golden apples (pp. 621-22) but the reverse does not hold.

H is G . While it is possible for one of the propositions p_1 - p_3 to be true and the others false, this can only be the case if some of the descriptions d_1 - d_3 are not co-denoting. Given that we both know that these descriptions are co-denoting, we know that the propositions p_1 - p_3 are true or false together.

This closure of the common ground is supported by a similar closure of belief, given that the common ground in the Pergola case is composed of propositions that we mutually believe. By your utterance of s_1 , you intend me to believe that p_1 . You do not intend, however, that I enter the fractured belief state in which I believe that the guy we are waiting to hear is drunk, believe that the guy we are waiting to hear is the author of Smells and Tickles, and yet fail to believe that the author of Smells and Tickles is drunk,¹⁷ nor do you intend me to give up my belief in the identity. Rather, you intend me to believe both of these propositions. Given that you manifestly share these beliefs, both become common ground.

4.2 Speaker-Meaning as the *Essential* Effect on the Common Ground

All of the propositions you mean are propositions that you intend to add to the common ground by your utterance, but not all propositions that you intend to add to the common ground by your utterance are propositions that you mean. Schiffer (1995, 125) notes that while “the speaker will expect numerous propositions to get conveyed to her audience, and many of these are such that the speaker would not have spoken as she did if she had thought that those propositions were either false or not going to be conveyed ... this does not show that those propositions are in any relevant sense meant.”

Schiffer presents the following reductio intended to support his claim that you mean nothing but the object-dependent proposition in the Pergola case whether you utter ‘He is drunk’ or ‘The guy’s drunk’, though the argument might equally be deployed to refute the suggestion that you mean p_2 and p_3 by your utterance of s_1 . If the speaker meant any of the propositions p_2 and p_3 by their utterance of s_1 , “then you might as well say that among the things she meant was that she believed that Pergola was drunk and that she had good reasons for that belief.” This argument assumes that there is no relevant difference between the propositions p_2 - p_3 and the proposition that you believed that Pergola was drunk and that you had good reasons for that belief. This assumption is false, the difference being that only the propositions p_2 - p_3 are conveyed in virtue of what Stalnaker (1978, 86) calls the ‘ESSENTIAL effect’ of your utterance.

Stalnaker is working with a possible worlds model on which the common ground is represented by the set of worlds at which all of our manifestly mutual knowledge is true,¹⁸ that is, by the set of worlds at which the person we are

¹⁷Indeed, it is not entirely clear that I could enter such a belief state. Frege cases do not easily arise when the agent knows that two descriptions are co-denoting. For Frege’s original presentation of these cases, see Frege (1892). Note his observation (p. 62) that “Anybody who did not know that the evening star is the morning star might hold the one thought [that the morning star is a body illuminated by the sun] to be true, the other [that the evening star is a body illuminated by the sun] false” and that it is restricted to individuals who do not recognize the definite descriptions to pick out the same object.

¹⁸Or, more precisely, by our common presuppositions. For the purposes at hand, however, may safely assume that our common knowledge exhausts our common presuppositions at the

waiting to hear is the author of Smells and Ticks and the person reputed to have solved the mind-body problem. The essential effect of your utterance of s_1 is to add p_1 to the common ground.¹⁹ In so doing, we eliminate not only all worlds in the set at which it is not the case that p_1 , but also all the worlds in the set at which it is not the case that p_2 and all worlds in the set at which it is not the case that p_3 , given that $C \cap p_1 = C \cap p_2 = C \cap p_3$, where C is the pre-existing common ground. The relationship is given by Fig. 1, where the square is the common ground and the other rectangles are any two of the propositions p_1 - p_3 .

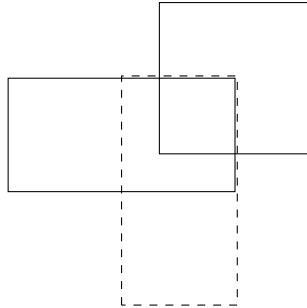


Figure 1:

The same relationship does not hold, however, between p_1 and the proposition that Pergola is drunk and that you had good reasons for that belief. Schiffer’s reductio therefore fails, as there is a criterion for speaker-meaning that excludes this proposition: you mean a bundle of propositions consisting of all and only the propositions that characterise the essential effect of your assertion, i.e. those propositions p such that $C \cap p_1 = C \cap p$.²⁰

outset of our conversation.

¹⁹There is something of an ambiguity in the notion of essential effect as characterised by Stalnaker. Characterising the essential effect of an utterance as the “particular way” in which the common ground is reduced, Stalnaker says “The particular way in which the [common ground] is reduced is that all of the possible situations incompatible with what is said are eliminated.” The possible situations eliminated from the common ground by saying that p depend on the worlds in the common ground prior to the utterance. From what Stalnaker says, it isn’t clear whether he takes the essential effect of an utterance to be defined by the set of situations it eliminates from the common ground, in which case two utterances made in different contexts may have different essential effects even when both say that p , or whether he takes every utterance which says that p to have the same essential effect. In what follows, I use ‘essential effect’ in the former sense.

²⁰An anonymous reviewer notes that it will often be common ground that the speaker believes what they say and has good reasons for that belief. In adding to the common ground the proposition that the speaker says that p_1 , we thereby add the proposition that the speaker has good reasons for believing p_1 . Note, however, that the essential effect of the assertion is just the addition of p_1 to the common ground, not the proposition that the speaker believes this content. While this latter proposition may enter the common ground, it is not due to the essential effect of the utterance. Another anonymous reviewer notes that it is common ground that p_1 if and only if it is common ground that p_1 is common ground, so the proposition that p_1 is common ground is bundled with the proposition that p_1 . The reviewer objects that we cannot plausibly identify this bundle of propositions with what is said. Correct. If the proposition that p_1 is common ground is bundled with p_1 then it is meant by an utterance of s_1 , yet only propositions of the form required by meaning-rule \mathcal{R} are said. As the proposition that p_1 is common ground is not of the right form, it is not said. The inclusion of this

The notion of *bundling* can be captured by other representations of the common ground, such as the representation of the common ground as analogous to a system of files.²¹ For each distinct object in the common ground, there corresponds a file that records all the properties that we assume the object to instantiate. For it to be common ground that the F is the G is to have a single file that records both ‘is the F ’ and ‘is the G ’. Our common ground is represented by the file in Fig. 2:

Is the person we are waiting to hear
 Is the author of Smells and Tickles
 Is the person reputed to have solved the mind-body problem

Figure 2:

If you say p_1 , then you intend to add that proposition to the common ground, which is to add ‘is drunk’ to the file containing ‘is the person we are waiting to hear’. The common ground that results from adding p_1 is characterised by Fig. 3. Again, the resulting file is identical, whichever of p_1 - p_3 you explicitly say. As ‘is drunk’ is added to a file containing d_1 - d_3 , we have added p_1 , p_2 and p_3 to the common ground.

Is the person we are waiting to hear
 Is the author of Smells and Tickles
 Is the person reputed to have solved the mind-body problem
 Is drunk

Figure 3:

4.3 Responding to the Meaning-Intention Problem

When you utter s_1 , there is a unique proposition (p_1) by which you identify the essential effect of your utterance. When you utter ‘The guy’s drunk’, no such proposition is made explicit, and I am left to identify a suitable proposition based on the context. Various candidates are (p_1 - p_3) but as these propositions all eliminate the same worlds from the common ground, there is still a clearly defined update that we can identify as the essential effect of your utterance. As you mean each of the propositions that characterise the essential effect of your utterance, you mean all of the propositions p_1 - p_3 and so mean some proposition of the form required by \mathcal{R} .

According to Schiffer’s (1995, 119-20) definition of *saying*:

Saying: “to say that p was *said/stated* in the utterance of a sentence is to say, first, that the speaker meant p in uttering the sentence, and, second, that

proposition in what is meant is not particularly problematic as it doesn’t complicate the process of interpretation (see section 4.4).

²¹Cf. Heim (1983).

the meaning of the sentence requires the literal speaker to mean some proposition of a type to which p conforms". Schiffer (1995, 119-20)

Of p_1 - p_3 , only p_1 is of the right type to be said by an utterance of s_1 . All three propositions, however, are of the right type to be said by an utterance of 'The guy's drunk'. So while there is no difference in your meaning, there is a difference in what you say.

The fifth premise of Schiffer's argument is correct. Given our conversational context, I cannot take you to have meant any one proposition of the form *that the H guy was drunk*. Premise 6 is false, however, as I can take you to mean the bundle of propositions p_1 - p_3 by identifying the contribution you intend to make to the common ground of our conversation. The conclusion is therefore avoided and the hidden-indexical theory can be retained in its original naive form, as characterised by meaning-rule \mathcal{R} , which requires only that there exists some proposition of the right form that the speaker means, not that the speaker means a unique proposition of this form.²²

We are of course free to define our terms so that you mean a proposition only when there is a unique proposition by which you intend your audience to identify your contribution to the common ground. Such a notion is, however, a distraction as far as the theory of communication goes, for it is clear from the above that you can successfully communicate p_1 - p_3 without characterising your contribution to the common ground by any unique proposition. In so far as \mathcal{R} is a contribution to the theory of communication, it should not be interpreted in this restrictive way.

One might wonder²³ what the role of the hidden-indexical theory is if we no longer presuppose that the speaker must say a unique proposition. Ultimately, the hidden-indexical theory can play the same role in the explanation of interpretation whether or not we require the speaker to mean a unique proposition of the required form. Given \mathcal{R} , the audience must look for some proposition of the right form that the speaker means. As the speaker may mean a bundle of propositions of the required form, however, there may be many propositions that the audience could use to grasp the speaker's meaning. As long as the audience identifies some proposition in the bundle, they will understand the speaker.²⁴

²²One might argue that the bundling account is as susceptible to the meaning-intention problem as any other description-theoretic view. On the bundling view, the speaker means a single proposition: that p_1 and p_2 and p_3 (or that d_1 , d_2 , and d_3 is drunk). But I can understand your utterance without taking you to mean this proposition. Ergo, it is not what you mean. (See Buchanan (2010, 353)). There are at least two ways to understand 'taking you to mean that p '. On one understanding, I take you to mean that p only if I intersect p with the common ground. On a second understanding, I take you to mean that p only if I add p to the common ground. Here, I take the second interpretation. Though I can understand you by intersecting any of p_1 - p_3 with the common ground, this is because I take you to mean that p_1 , p_2 , and p_3 , whichever I explicitly intersect with the common ground. More generally, this challenge misconstrues the bundling approach. There is a difference between meaning a bundle of propositions and meaning the conjunction of its members. In the first case, the entirety of your meaning is given by the intersection of the common ground with any one member of the bundle. In the second, the individual conjuncts have different effects on the common ground and no one conjunct gives the speaker's whole meaning. My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting that I address this concern.

²³As does an anonymous reviewer.

²⁴This point is addressed further in section 5.1.

4.4 Defusing the Cognitive Burden Objection

The bundling view provides a response to the cognitive burden objection with which we concluded section 3. Taking you to mean a bundle of propositions needn't be any more cognitively complex than taking you to mean a single proposition. I can understand you by using any one member of the bundle to identify your contribution to the common ground and so identifying every proposition that you mean. There is no need to go on by explicitly deriving every other member of the bundle.

Underdetermination of a unique completing property needn't complicate the interpretation of incomplete definite descriptions. If anything, it makes the interpretive process easier. It would arguably take more cognitive work for me to take you to mean only one member of the bundle, as I would first have to alter my conception of the common ground by cutting the connections between the propositions p_1 - p_3 (e.g. by eliminating d_2 and d_3 from the file) before updating it with one of those propositions (e.g. p_1). Underdetermination of a unique completing property allows for different ways in which your utterance can be understood: I can understand you whichever completing property I initially identify and whether I initially interpret you as meaning p_1 , p_2 , or p_3 .

4.5 Bundles and Object-Dependence

The bundle of propositions that you mean can include both description-theoretic and object-dependent propositions. In the Pergola case, we assume not only that d_1 - d_3 are co-denoting, but that Pergola himself uniquely satisfies these descriptions. For it to be common ground that Pergola is F is for there to be a file indexed to Pergola that records 'is the F ', as in Fig. 4:

Pergola
Is the person we are waiting to hear
Is the author of Smells and Tickles
Is the person reputed to have solved the mind-body problem

Figure 4:

In adding 'is drunk' to this file, it not only becomes common ground that the person I am waiting to hear is drunk etc., but that Pergola is drunk. Whether you say that Pergola is drunk, or one of the propositions p_1 - p_3 , your contribution to the common ground is precisely the same and you mean precisely the same propositions.²⁵ The same result is achieved in the possible worlds framework by

²⁵The view thus accommodates Schiffer's (1995, 120) observation that the case in which you utter 'He is drunk' and the case in which you utter 'The guy's drunk' have "*exact psychological parity with respect to those psychological facts on which the relevant speaker meaning would have to supervene*". He goes on to claim, however, that this stands against the hidden-indexical theory because "Clearly, there is no property H such that the speaker [who utters 'He is drunk'] definitely meant that the H male was drunk." While the bundling view agrees that there needn't be any *unique* such property, it denies that there is *no* such property. The speaker means the descriptive propositions p_1 - p_3 as well as the object-dependent proposition. Schiffer (2005, 1165) is concerned that if "the same things would be meant whether one uttered 'He is G' or 'The male is G' ... there would seem not to be any reasonable basis for attributing

representing the initial common ground as the set of worlds at which Pergola satisfies the descriptions d_1-d_3 , rather than the set of worlds at which someone (whether identical to Pergola or not) satisfies these descriptions.

Schiffer's object-dependent analysis explained the peculiarity of reporting you as having 'meant that the guy we are waiting to hear is drunk and meant that the guy who authored Smells and Ticks is drunk'. If both descriptions denote the same proposition, then one conjunct is superfluous. The bundling account offers a similar explanation. The report is overly complex because any one of the conjuncts captures your meaning in its entirety for one familiar with the common ground against which you made your utterance. Following Grice's (1989, 27) Maxims of Manner, we should avoid such unnecessary prolixity. Such a report is also potentially misleading, as it may be taken to suggest that these propositions were not bundled in the original context of utterance.

Unlike Schiffer's object-dependent analysis, the present view has no trouble explaining why the conjoined report is less peculiar when uttered to someone who doesn't realise that the descriptions d_1-d_3 are co-denoting. For that person, your meaning one of the propositions p_1-p_3 does not clearly entail meaning all of the propositions p_1-p_3 . If they have an interest in all of these propositions, it may be worth mentioning them independently.

4.6 Bundles and S-Meaning

There are at least two similarities between the bundling account and the s-meaning account offered by B&O. Both take the speaker's communicative intentions to be characterised by a relation between the speaker and a set of propositions, and both take the original Pergola case to be characterised by a certain indifference on the part of the speaker. While B&O locate this indifference in the speaker's meaning, denying that there is any proposition the speaker means, the bundling account restricts indifference to the manner in which the audience identifies the speaker's meaning. The speaker means p_1-p_3 but is indifferent as to which of these propositions the audience uses to identify their intended contribution to the common ground.

The bundling view explains the Pergola case while preserving determinate speaker-meaning, but can also accommodate genuine cases of s-meaning. These are cases in which there is no proposition that the speaker means because their utterance leaves open a number of completing properties that determine distinct, non-bundled propositions. In such cases, it would be odd to describe the speaker as having 'meant' one of these non-bundled propositions. Unlike the s-meaning account, the bundling account makes immediate sense of the meaning-reports that are appropriate in the Pergola case: it is appropriate to report you as having 'meant that s_n ' for any of the sentences s_1-s_3 because you mean all of the propositions p_1-p_3 . B&O (2005, 900) take the plurality of appropriate meaning-reports to indicate that no one report "perfectly captures [your] intention." The bundling approach takes these reports to be appropriate because every one perfectly captures your intention.

different [meanings] to the two sentences." My primary basis for distinguishing the meanings of these sentences is the intuition that only the object-dependent proposition is of the right form to be said by an utterance of 'He is drunk'. While this intuition isn't the last word on the matter, Schiffer doesn't offer any reason to doubt it.

4.7 Summary

According to the hidden-indexical theory, the use of definite descriptions is governed by \mathcal{R} :

\mathcal{R} : Utter ‘The F is G ’ only if there is a property H such that you mean that the F and H is G .

Schiffer objects that there is often no proposition of this form that the speaker means because the property H is often underdetermined. I can understand your utterance in the Pergola case and understanding requires that I take you to mean every proposition that you in fact mean. As I cannot take you to mean any one proposition of the form required by \mathcal{R} , you cannot mean any such proposition.

The bundling view responds as follows. A speaker’s meaning is given by the essential effect of their utterance: the elimination of a certain set of worlds from the common ground. The speaker means all and only the propositions that would eliminate these worlds.²⁶ Given the existing common ground, p_1 , p_2 , and p_3 eliminate the same worlds. If you mean one of these propositions, therefore, you mean them all. While Schiffer correctly notes that you cannot mean any one proposition of the form required by \mathcal{R} , this does not falsify the hidden-indexical theory as \mathcal{R} is consistent with the speaker meaning many propositions of the required form. Although there is no unique property H provided by the context, this needn’t present any barrier to understanding. The different properties available in the context present different ways of interpreting your utterance, identifying the worlds you intend to eliminate from the common ground, and so the propositions that you mean.

5 Referential and Attributive Uses of Definite Descriptions

5.1 The Referential/Attributive Distinction

Schiffer argues that Russellian accounts of definite descriptions, such as the hidden-indexical theory, fail to explain how referentially-used descriptions communicate object-dependent propositions. He assumes that the restrictions governing definite descriptions (\mathcal{R} if the hidden-indexical theory is correct) must play a role in any explanation of referential usage. Standard Russellian accounts of referential usage meet this requirement by viewing object-dependent propositions as communicated via something like Gricean implicature.²⁷ According to Grice (1989, 31) implicatures must be capable of being worked out on the basis of what is said²⁸ but Schiffer (2005, 1168-9) notes that “When a definite description is used referentially, a hearer cannot even identify *candidate* descriptive propositions except on the basis of knowing that to which the speaker was referring in uttering the definite description”.²⁹ Even if a speaker communicates

²⁶In [redacted for anonymous review], I present an alternative: you mean all and only those propositions added to the common ground by the essential effect of your utterance.

²⁷Or the “say-p-►-mean-q model”, as Schiffer puts it. See Neale (1990, 89) for an account of this kind.

²⁸Or on the basis of what the speaker has “made as if to say”. Grice (1989, 34).

²⁹My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for bringing this argument to my attention.

a descriptive proposition by a referential use of a definite description, this fact cannot explain the communication of object-dependent propositions. The order of explanation is precisely the reverse.

The bundling approach presents an alternative explanation of referential usage. The key to this explanation is provided by Donnellan (1966, 288): “when a definite description is used referentially, not only is there in some sense a presupposition or implication that someone or something fits the description, as there is also in the attributive use, but there is a quite different presupposition; the speaker presupposes of some particular someone or something that he or it fits the description.” If I use the description ‘The guy is drunk’ referentially, then I presuppose that some particular individual—let it be Pergola—satisfies the description.³⁰ As already noted, this presupposition ensures that the propositions p_1 - p_3 are bundled with the proposition that Pergola is drunk. The bundling view therefore predicts that I communicate the object-dependent proposition by my utterance.

Schiffer may be right that the communication of descriptive propositions sometimes depends on the communication of object-dependent propositions, but this doesn’t mean that \mathcal{R} is redundant in the explanation of referential usage.³¹ The hidden-indexical theory may explain a referential use of ‘The guy’s drunk’ as follows. By \mathcal{R} , I know that you mean some proposition of the form *that the H guy is drunk*. In looking for some completing property H , I restrict my focus to contextually salient guys. There is only one—Pergola—so I recognise that you mean Pergola is drunk, which is bundled with various descriptive propositions. While recognition that you mean an object-dependent proposition explains the recognition that you mean descriptive propositions, the meaning-constraints imposed by \mathcal{R} play a central role in the explanation, as Schiffer requires.

5.2 Presupposition Failure

Donnellan (1966, 286) further distinguishes referential and attributive uses of definite descriptions by considering presupposition failure. If there is no F , then an utterance of ‘The F is G ’ can be used to state something of a particular individual only if the description is used referentially. If the description is used attributively, then it is used to say something about whatever fits the description. If nothing satisfies the description, nothing has been said to be G . In using a description referentially, however, the speaker means that some particular individual has some particular property. This proposition may well be communicated to one’s audience, even if that individual in fact fails to satisfy the description used.

According to some interpretations,³² Donnellan did not only think that an

³⁰Note that this presupposition is not required to be true, so we agree with Donnellan that I might successfully say something true about a man drinking water by using the description ‘the man drinking a martini’. See the following subsection.

³¹Nor should we find it particularly surprising that audiences must sometimes identify some other proposition that the speaker means in order to know what they have said. In coming to know what you have said by your utterance of ‘She divorced Brian’, I need to work out the referent of ‘She’. I may do so by first recognising that you mean that Brian is divorced (which may be the central proposition you intend to convey) and infer that ‘She’ referred to Mary from my knowledge that Mary is the only person Brian has ever married.

³²Such interpretations can be found, for example, in Wiggins (1975, 28, n. 9), Lockwood (1975, 485-6, n. 21) and Reimer (1998, 90).

object-dependent proposition can be communicated by a referentially-used definite description; he thought that the object-dependent proposition is *said*. Donnellan (1966, 298) says, for example, that “Using a definite description referentially, a speaker may say something true even though the description correctly applies to nothing.” He expands upon this claim, however, by telling us that “The sense in which he may say something true is the sense in which he may say something true *about someone or something*” (my italics) and that “This sense is . . . an interesting one that needs investigation”. This suggests that Donnellan did not intend to identify his notion of *saying something about some individual* with the intuitive notion of *what is said* by an utterance.³³ Similar hedges³⁴ are found throughout Donnellan (1966) and leave room for an interpretation according to which Donnellan is committed to nothing stronger than the view that referentially used definite descriptions communicate object-dependent propositions. He need not be committed to the much stronger view that this proposition is said.³⁵

The bundling account of referential usage agrees with this interpretation of Donnellan. You can say something true about Pergola (in Donnellan’s sense) by a referential utterance of ‘The author of Smells and Ticks is drunk’, even if it should turn out that Smells and Ticks was co-authored. Communication of the object-dependent proposition depends only on the presupposition that Pergola is the author of Smells and Ticks, not the truth of this presupposition.

If I discover that this presupposition was false, then I discover that some of the propositions you meant cannot be true, but this needn’t lead me to conclude that you meant nothing about Pergola. You uttered ‘The author of Smells and Ticks is drunk’ because you presupposed that Pergola is the author of Smells and Ticks. Once this presupposition is shown to be false, your reason for uttering this sentence is undermined, but I may still interpret you as having meant the object-dependent proposition. Had you known that this presupposition was false, you likely would have expressed yourself by uttering ‘Pergola is drunk’ or by using one of the other available descriptions, each of which would have communicated the same propositions in the original context, and all of which would communicate the object-dependent proposition about Pergola even after the recognition that Smells and Ticks was co-authored. Such reinterpretation will not always be permissible, of course. In many cases, the evidential basis for the utterance will be undermined when the falsity of the presupposition is revealed. In the case at issue, however, your evidential basis is Pergola’s observed behaviour, which provides evidence for Pergola’s drunkenness

³³Donnellan (1966, 295, n. 12) notes that the notion in play is “the notion of saying something true *of someone*”. Original italics.

³⁴“Jones might, for example, accuse us of saying false things *of him* in calling him insane” (p. 286)

“But where the definite description is used referentially, something true may well have been said. It is possible that something true was said *of the person or thing referred to*.” (p. 295)

“But when we consider it as used referentially . . . the man the speaker referred to may indeed be kind to the spinster; the speaker may have said something true *about that man*” (p. 300)

“If we think about what the speaker said about the person he referred to, then there is no reason to suppose he has not said something true or false *about him*” (p. 302)

All italics my own.

³⁵Which Wiggins (1975, 28, n. 9), Lockwood (1975, 485-6, n. 21), Reimer (1998, 94), and Soames (1994, 154) take to be problematic.

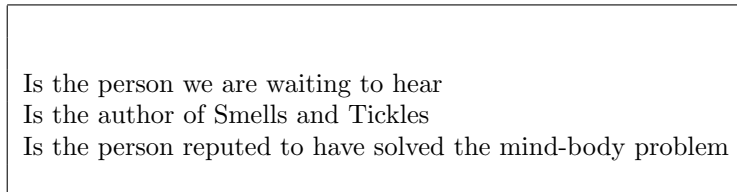
whether or not he is the unique author.

6 Underdetermination of the Common Ground

6.1 A Revenge Problem

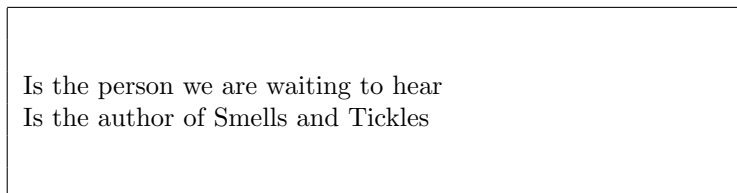
In closing, I want to consider a potential revenge problem. Schiffer's Pergola case included a mutually evident common ground but interlocutors often enter conversations with different background beliefs and may be unsure which are shared.³⁶ In such cases, it is not plausible to suggest that the speaker's meaning is determined by the actual common ground about which the speaker may be mistaken.³⁷ Rather, the speaker's meaning will be determined by their conception of the common ground.

This suggests a return to the meaning-intention problem, as the speaker's conception of the common ground will not always be clear. Suppose that I am not sure of whether you conceive of the common ground as Fig. 5 or Fig. 6:



Is the person we are waiting to hear
Is the author of Smells and Tickles
Is the person reputed to have solved the mind-body problem

Figure 5:



Is the person we are waiting to hear
Is the author of Smells and Tickles

Figure 6:

Again, you utter 'The guy's drunk'. If I take Fig. 5 to characterise your conception of the common ground, then I take you mean p_1-p_3 . If I take Fig. 6

³⁶Stalnaker (1978, 85) notes that everyone in a conversation has a motivation to converge on a mutually recognised conception of the common ground but this shows only that conversational participants will tend towards convergence, not that they will reach it.

³⁷At least if we assume that a speaker's meaning is transparent in that speakers always know what they mean. There are reasons to be sceptical of this assumption, however. Egan (2009) describes a billboard reading 'Jesus loves you!' and convincingly argues (pp. 262-5) that, for any audience A, the person who made the billboard might reasonably mean that Jesus loves A. The maker of the billboard has no idea of who will eventually read it, so cannot know what proposition they mean. Perhaps a speaker's meaning is sometimes determined by the audience's conception of the common ground. In constructing the billboard, the maker allows for their meaning to be determined by the audience's belief as to their own identity. We might say something similar in the Pergola case: the speaker means whichever propositions are bundled by the audience's conception of the common ground. This response allows for the possibility that the audience may understand the speaker perfectly even if they have no idea of what the speaker is presupposing, though there is not space here to work out the details.

to characterise your conception of the common ground, then I take you to mean only p_1 and p_2 . Again we have a context where there are two candidates for the speaker’s meaning and seemingly no way to decide between them, threatening the conclusion that speakers in these seemingly ordinary cases are unable to mean anything by their utterances:

1. For all sets of propositions Γ , a speaker, speaking literally, meant all and only the members of Γ if and only if one who understood their utterance perfectly well took them to have meant all and only the members of Γ .³⁸
2. You speak literally and I understand your utterance perfectly.
3. For all sets of propositions Γ , you meant all and only the members of Γ if and only if I took you to have meant all and only the members of Γ . (1,2)
4. There is no Γ such that I can take you to have meant all and only the members of Γ because I cannot tell whether the propositions you meant are determined by Fig. 5 or Fig. 6.
5. There is no Γ such that you meant all and only the members of Γ . (3,4)

6.2 Two Responses

There are at least two ways we might attempt to avoid the conclusion of the above argument. First, deny the second premise. While perfect understanding was an extremely plausible assumption in the original Pergola case, which assumed a mutually evident common ground, it becomes questionable in the absence of this assumption. If I enter the conversation with an imperfect understanding of the context against which you make your utterance, it is not obvious that I can understand you perfectly. If conversation rarely takes places against a clearly defined common ground, then we may fall short of perfect understanding in the majority of cases but this consequence is far less problematic for the bundling view than it was for the meagre view of speaker-meaning assumed by the original argument. By allowing that the speaker typically means a multitude of propositions, we allow for various degrees of understanding depending on the similarity between the set of propositions that the audience takes the speaker to mean and the set of propositions that the speaker in fact means.

Second, deny the first premise. To understand you perfectly, I needn’t know, for every proposition p , whether or not you meant that p because your communicative intentions are not so fine-grained. On this account, I understand you if and only if I take an attitude that satisfies your intentions. We can distinguish between three classes of propositions: those you mean, those you anti-mean, and those you are indifferent towards. If you mean p then I understand you only if I take you to mean that p . If you anti-mean p then I understand you only if I don’t take you to mean that p . If you are indifferent towards p , then I can understand you whether or not I take you to mean that p . In the case at issue, you mean p_1 and p_2 , and are indifferent towards p_3 . I can understand you without knowing whether you conceive of the common ground by Fig. 5 or Fig. 6 because my attitudes accord with your communicative intentions whether or not I take you to mean that p_3 .

³⁸I take this biconditional to be at least as plausible as Schiffer’s original premise.

The indifference here goes beyond that which characterises s-meaning. In cases of s-meaning, the speaker is indifferent as to which member of a set the audience entertains, so long as they entertain some member. In this case, the speaker is totally indifferent as to whether or not they are taken to mean any of the propositions they are indifferent towards. In section 3.3, we noted that it is not entirely clear what attitude an audience must take towards an s-meant proposition in order to understand the speaker. The problem does not arise for the present notion of indifference. The only attitude at play is the attitude of taking someone to mean something. To understand a speaker, the audience must take them to mean every proposition that they mean and must not take them to mean any proposition that they anti-mean. Regarding indifferent propositions, either attitude is acceptable.

But regardless of whether the premises of the argument are correct, I am tempted to accept the conclusion. It seems likely that there will often be propositions p such that I cannot tell whether you mean that p or are indifferent towards p and, further, that your intentions themselves will not always clearly distinguish between what you mean and what you are indifferent towards. Note, however, that this conclusion is compatible with the naive hidden-indexical theory. When there is uncertainty as to the common ground, this is usually because there is uncertainty as to how far the common ground extends, not because there is nothing that is clearly common ground. In the case above, I cannot tell whether you conceive of the common ground as Fig. 5 or Fig. 6, but you mean p_1 and p_2 either way. As long as there is some completing description that is manifestly common ground, there is some proposition that I can take you to mean, in satisfaction of \mathcal{R} .³⁹

7 Conclusion

Incomplete definite descriptions are an example of loose talk in which the sentence uttered is false on its most strict interpretation. When we appeal to the context in order to identify some true elaboration of the sentence uttered, there might be many different interpretations that are supported by the context. This paper has defended the *bundling* approach, on which speaker's meaning is fully captured by the effect of any one of various different propositions on the common ground.

The account was presented as a response to Schiffer's meaning-intention problem against the hidden-indexical theory of definite descriptions. Schiffer points out that there are often various different properties that an interpreter might appeal to in order to elaborate on an incomplete definite description. According to the bundling approach, such underdetermination does not always pose a problem for interpretation. Where each of the contextually-viable interpretations identifies one of the propositions in the bundle that the speaker means, there are many different ways of coming to understand the speaker.

³⁹What about a speaker who does not determinately mean any proposition? In such cases, I defer to B&O's account of s-meaning. While there is no proposition that the speaker means, their communicative intentions may be satisfied as long as the audience entertains some member of a set of propositions.

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