

# Strong Contextual Felicity and Felicitous Underspecification<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction: The Plan

Consider the class of contextually sensitive expressions whose context independent meanings do not by themselves suffice to secure semantic values for those expressions in contexts. Demonstratives and deictically used pronouns are the most obvious examples of such expressions. But arguably gradable adjectives, modals, possessives, tense, quantifiers, expressions that take implicit arguments ('ready') and 'only' are examples as well. I'll call such expressions *supplementives* to highlight the fact that they need some sort of supplementation in contexts to acquire semantic values in those contexts.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of the present paper is to investigate two properties of at least some supplementives that *prima facie* seem to be in tension with one another. On the one hand, in at least some cases in which a supplementive is used in context but there is insufficient information in the context for hearers to recover a unique semantic value for the expression, the result is infelicity. On the other hand, in at least some cases a supplementive can be felicitously used in a case in which there is not enough information in the context to recover a unique semantic value for the expression. I'll argue that all supplementives have both

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<sup>2</sup> If you don't like this way of characterizing supplementives, we can also characterize them as the contextually sensitive expressions for which it is unclear how they secure semantic values in context (unlike 'I', 'today' and so on).

kinds of uses<sup>3</sup> ; and I'll suggest a way to reconcile the claims that supplementives possess each of these apparently conflicting properties. Finally, I'll suggest an explanation for some of the differences in behavior of supplementives we see in the cases we consider.<sup>4</sup>

### 1. Background: Projected Content

There are various cases in which a sentence *S* containing an (simple or complex) expression *t* has a certain implication *m* in virtue of containing *t*, where *S* continues to imply *m* when it is embedded under negation, under a modal, in the antecedent of a conditional, or turned into a question. (I follow Tonhauser et al. [2013] in using 'having an implication *m*' as neutral between *entailing m*, *asserting m*, *con conversationally implicating m* and so on.) In such a case, call *m* a *projected meaning/content* and call *t* a *trigger*.<sup>5</sup> To take a simple example, the following show that 'stopped smoking' is a trigger with *x used to smoke* as the projected meaning:

- 1a. Jim stopped smoking.
- 1b. Jim didn't stop smoking.
- 1c. Jim may have stopped smoking.
- 1d. If Jim stopped smoking, I'll be surprised.
- 1e. Did Jim stop smoking?

All of 1a-1e imply that Jim used to smoke.<sup>6</sup>

Loosely following Stalnaker [1978] and in accordance with assumptions made by Tonhauser et al. [2013], whom I'll be discussing, let's assume that conversations take place in *contexts*, which are understood at least in part as bodies of information that are presumed to be common by conversational participants. We can then talk of a given conversational context *entailing* this or that proposition. In the presupposition literature, it was long thought that triggers as described above just are *presupposition* triggers, that the projected contents in such cases are *presuppositions*, and that presuppositions impose the condition on a context that it entail them. Hence, a sentence *S* that presupposes *m* in virtue of containing a given presupposition trigger *t* can only be used felicitously in a context *c* that entails *m*. So for example, a sentence like:

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<sup>3</sup> David Beaver and Kai von Stechow [2013a, b] argue that only some supplementives have each property. An earlier version of this paper discussed this material in detail. But since the work is unpublished and not available online, I've downplayed my discussion of this material. I'll add again that I am indebted to Beaver and von Stechow's unpublished work on these topics.

<sup>4</sup> Thanks to an anonymous referee of an earlier draft of this paper who suggested essentially this summary of the main points of the paper.

<sup>5</sup> I take *m* to be a proposition. This characterization of triggers may not seem to apply happily to triggers like clefts, where arguably the whole sentence is the trigger. In such a case we will take the sentence *S* to (non-properly) contain *t* in the sense that *S=t*.

<sup>6</sup> Chierchia and McConnell-Ginet [1990] (pp. 28–31 and 349–352) dub collections of sentences like 1a-e *the (relevant) P family* and call this diagnostic for projected content *The P family test*. See note 8 below.

2. Alan is in jail again.

containing the presupposition trigger ‘again’ can only be felicitously used in a context that entails that Alan was in jail before. That Alan was in jail before is the presupposition of 2 and its projected content (consider ‘Alan is not in jail again.’ etc.).

Of course, it had been long realized that under certain conditions, a sentence *S* containing trigger *t* that as a result presupposes *m* can be used felicitously in a context that *doesn’t* entail *m*. So, for example, many people think that the sentence ‘I have to pick up my wife up at the airport’ presupposes that I have a wife in virtue of containing the DP ‘my wife’, and yet I can felicitously utter this sentence in a conversation I just struck up with someone at a bar who doesn’t know I am married as a way of explaining why I must leave. A common view is that in such cases the felicity of the utterance of the sentence is preserved by *accommodation*: the process by means of which conversational participants “quietly and without fuss”<sup>7</sup> adjust the context by adding the presupposed proposition to it upon hearing the utterance with the presupposition.

However, gradually the notions of *trigger* and *projected meaning* have come to be thought of as broader than that of *presupposition* trigger and projected *presupposition*. To take one example, appositives and non-restrictive relative clauses (NRRC’s) seem to be triggers and to project their contents, but the felicity of sentences containing them in context does not at all seem to require the context to entail the content of the appositive or NRRC.<sup>8</sup> I can felicitously introduce someone to you by saying:

3. Sophie, who just published her first book, lives in Mammoth.

where I know you had no idea Sophie just published her first book. Indeed, appositives and NRRCs seem *most* felicitous when their contents are *not* entailed by the context.<sup>9</sup>

## 2. Strong Contextual Felicity

Recently, Tonhauser et al. [2013] have claimed that certain triggers impose particularly strict conditions on contexts. Tonhauser et al. [2013], who call the effect *Strong Contextual Felicity* (SCF), put the point this way:

Strong contextual felicity refers to a particular condition on the felicitous use of a trigger, namely, that it can be used felicitously only if some implication associated with the trigger is established in the utterance context.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Von Fintel [2008]

<sup>8</sup> This is noted by Chierchia and McConnell-Ginet [1990] p. 351–352 for NRRC’s. They use this fact to argue, correctly, that the “family of sentences” test using sentences like 1a–e is a test for *projected content* (as they put it, *backgrounded propositions*) and not *presupposed content* since NRRC’s are not presuppositional but project their contents. Beaver [2001] (p. 20 note 14) remarks that Böer and Lycan [1976] provided an early argument against the presuppositionality of “attributive” (non-restrictive) relative clauses. Beaver [2001] (pp. 19–20) also notes that though parentheticals project their contents, they don’t seem presuppositional in the sense that they don’t require contexts to entail their contents to be felicitous.

<sup>9</sup> Potts [2005] p. 38 notes that epithets and honorifics (*expressives* in his terminology—which he includes under the heading *conventional implicatures* along with NRRC’s and parentheticals—*supplements* in his terminology) are additional examples of triggers that project their contents but are not presuppositional.

<sup>10</sup> Tonhauser et al. [2013] p. 67.

If we understand the notion of *some implication m associated with the trigger being established in the utterance context* as the context entailing m, then Tonhauser et al. [2013] are claiming that when a trigger t in sentence S imposes an SCF with projected meaning m, S can be felicitously used only in contexts that already entail m. And should the context not do so, felicity cannot be saved by accommodation. So SCF’s work in the way presuppositions have long been thought to work, except that they do not allow accommodation.

The examples of SCF triggers that I will be concerned with at the outset are deictically used personal pronouns and (simple and complex) demonstratives. Imagine my wife and I are sitting quietly in a café working. No male is salient or was previously discussed. Out of the blue, I say:<sup>11</sup>

4. \*He’s a piece of work.

The utterance here is very infelicitous. If the infelicity here is due to SCF, there must be some projected content that is not entailed by the context. Tonhauser et al. [2013] talk of an *existence implication*: at one point they gloss this as the implication that “there is a discourse referent with which the pronoun can be identified”.<sup>12</sup> This cannot be right taken literally, since surely the felicitous use of a pronoun cannot require the context to entail the proposition that the pronoun is *identical* to some *discourse referent*. Later, they gloss the implication as the implication that the pronoun has a referent.<sup>13</sup> This seems closer to what is wanted, though it seems to me the implication should be something more like *that the use of the pronoun refers to e*, where e is some specific entity.<sup>14</sup> Call this proposition the *reference implication*. Since in the case of 4, the context will not entail the reference implication for any specific e, the utterance 4 is infelicitous. More generally, Tonhauser et al [2013] claim that deictically used pronouns and demonstratives impose an SCF on contexts (i.e. are SCF triggers), where we are supposing that the particular condition they impose on contexts is that they entail the reference implication for some specific e.<sup>15</sup> Again, they think that accommodation cannot rescue an SCF violation as in 4.

A natural idea is that SCF effects triggered by pronouns can be explained by appeal to the “textbook” semantics and the corresponding Appropriateness Condition for pronouns.<sup>16</sup> To pursue this idea, suppose pronouns come with phonologically null indices that are essentially variables. Then the standard semantics for pronouns is that they are given semantic values relative to variable assignments, which are partial functions from indices to objects:

Standard (textbook) semantics for pronouns:

If  $\alpha_i$  is a pronoun and g is a variable assignment and i is in the domain of g, then  $\|\alpha_i\|^{g=g(i)}$ .<sup>17</sup>

<sup>11</sup> The example is from Beaver and von Stechow [2013a] p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> P. 74

<sup>13</sup> P. 79

<sup>14</sup> For my purposes, I don’t think much hangs on what *exactly* the projected content is here.

<sup>15</sup> Tonhauser et al [2013] p. 80. I actually don’t think demonstratives are referring expressions. See King [2001]. But for present purposes, I’ll talk as though they are.

<sup>16</sup> Beaver and von Stechow [2013a,b] consider this idea but ultimately reject it. I will too in a sense.

<sup>17</sup> E.g. see Heim and Kratzer [1998] p. 111

We then add that contexts of utterance *determine* variable assignments giving rise to the following *Appropriateness Condition*:

Appropriateness Condition

A context  $c$  is *appropriate* for an LF  $\phi$  only if  $c$  determines a variable assignment whose domain includes every index free in  $\phi$ .<sup>18</sup>

Call the standard semantics together with the Appropriateness Condition for pronouns above *SAC*. Let's try to derive the occurrence of SCF effects (infelicity) for an LF in a context from the claim that the context (together with SAC) fails to entail the reference implication for a pronoun in the LF. Suppose that an LF  $\phi$  containing a (unbound) pronoun  $\alpha_i$  is uttered in  $c$ , where  $c$  together with SAC ( $c$ +SAC) does not entail that  $\alpha_i$  has a referent (i.e.  $c$ +SAC does not entail the reference implication for  $\alpha_i$  to the effect that it refers to some specific  $e$ ).<sup>19</sup> But if  $c$ +SAC entailed that  $c$  determines a variable assignment  $g$  whose domain includes  $i$ , then  $c$ +SAC *would* entail the reference implication for  $\alpha_i$  to the effect that it refers to  $g(i)$ . Hence,  $c$ +SAC does not entail that  $c$  determines a variable assignment  $g$  whose domain includes  $i$ . So  $c$ +SAC does not entail that  $c$  is appropriate for  $\phi$  (if it did,  $c$ +the Appropriateness Condition, and hence  $c$ +SAC, *would* entail that  $c$  determines a variable assignment  $g$  whose domain includes  $i$ ). So  $\phi$  is infelicitous in  $c$ .

For ease of expression I'll henceforth talk of *a pronoun not having a referent in a context  $c$*  instead of talking of  *$c$  not entailing that the pronoun has a referent* (i.e. the reference implication for the pronoun for some specific object  $e$ ). Despite such loose talk, the latter is the official story we are currently considering as to how SCF effects arise.

The appeal to *pronouns/variables* here really isn't crucial for the explanation of SCF effects. Call an account of how the semantic value of a supplementive is fixed in context a *metasemantics* for that supplementive. Put in terms of the textbook semantics for pronouns we are considering, a metasemantics for pronouns would be an account of *how* a context  $c$  determines a variable assignment  $g$ ; or equivalently, an account of what it is about  $c$  that makes  $\alpha_i$  refer to  $g(i)$ . What is crucial for the exhibition of SCF effects on the present account is that for a given supplementive, the metasemantics requires the context to fix a value for the supplementive (this is the analogue for such expressions of the context determining a variable assignment defined on its index in the case of a pronoun) or the context will not be *appropriate* for an LF containing the supplementive, resulting in infelicity. So the explanation of SCF effects offered here claims that any supplementive governed by such a metasemantics will display SCF effects. Hence if supplementives are governed by the sort of metasemantics just described, they should give rise to SCF effects whether they are variables or not.

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<sup>18</sup> Heim and Kratzer [1998] p. 243.

<sup>19</sup> We consider  $c$  together with SAC, because the thought is that when hearers and speakers make judgments about what their contexts entail regarding the semantics of pronouns, they bring to bear their tacit knowledge of the semantics and metasemantics of pronouns in making those judgments. Though conversational participants in some sense know SAC, it shouldn't be included in the body of information in the context. The latter comprise the propositions that are mutually knowingly accepted for the purposes of the conversation. Whatever the exact cognitive relation conversational participants bear to SAC, it seems importantly different from the relation they bear to propositions they mutually knowingly accept for the purposes of the conversation. Thus we keep them separate. Thanks to an anonymous referee for comments here.

### 3. Plan for the Rest of the Paper

I have recently been defending a metasemantics that I claim applies to all supplementives.<sup>20</sup> The metasemantics is of the sort mentioned above: it claims that a context is *inappropriate* for an LF if it doesn't assign a value in the context to a supplementive in the LF.<sup>21</sup> Hence, it appears to predict SCF effects (infelicity) for all supplementives when they aren't assigned semantic values in context.

Here is the plan for the rest of the present work. First, I want to argue that all supplementives *do* give rise to SCF effects.<sup>22</sup> Second, I want to argue that all supplementives have felicitous uses in which they have not been assigned specific semantic values.<sup>23</sup> Third, I'll claim that while the fact that supplementives have felicitous uses in cases in which they lack a specific semantic value in context doesn't refute a metasemantics like the one I favor, it does suggest that the appropriateness condition such a metasemantics is coupled with should be altered in certain ways. Arguing the first two points amounts to arguing that supplementives behave similarly regarding SCF and related phenomena. Such similarity of behavior is consistent with and perhaps even supports my claim that all supplementives are governed by the same metasemantics. Finally, I want to argue, or, perhaps better, *suggest* that what differences there are in the behavior of supplementives in respect of SCF effects and related phenomena are to be explained in terms of conversational purposes and the different roles different supplementives play in conversation. Though I can't of course really consider *all* supplementives here, in addition to pronouns and demonstratives, I will consider quantifiers, tense, relational expressions taking implicit arguments, 'only', possessives and gradable adjectives.

Before arguing the above points, we need to clear something up. Consider again the characterization of SCF from Tonhauser et al. [2013]:

Strong contextual felicity refers to a particular condition on the felicitous use of a trigger, namely, that it can be used felicitously only if some implication associated with the trigger is established in the utterance context.<sup>24</sup>

Often, speakers make clear who they referring to with a pronoun as they are uttering it or even after they have done so ("He [gesturing with my head after uttering] is a jerk."). So the relevant context in which the implication must be established for felicity is the one including the information that the sentence containing the SCF trigger has been uttered but which has not been updated with the content of this sentence.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> King [2013, 2014a,b].

<sup>21</sup> I have sometimes stated the Appropriateness Condition in the converse: if each supplementive in an LF  $\phi$  is assigned a value in context  $c$ ,  $c$  is appropriate for  $\phi$ . In so doing, I had in mind that the context in question was appropriate for the LF *with respect to supplementives*. Of course, the context could still be "inappropriate" for the LF on other respects (regarding presuppositions or etc.)

<sup>22</sup> This is contrary to what Beaver and von Stechow [2013 a,b] claim.

<sup>23</sup> This again is contrary to what Beaver and von Stechow [2013a,b] claim.

<sup>24</sup> Tonhauser et al [2013] p. 67.

<sup>25</sup> Thanks to an anonymous referee for helpful comments here.

#### 4. All Supplementives give rise to SCF effects

To begin to argue that all supplementives give rise to SCF effects (subject to qualifications given below), consider again 4 above, uttered where no unique male is salient (see the more extensive gloss described above):

4. \*He’s a piece of work.

In this case, there is an “out of the blue” utterance of 4, where the hearer can find no plausible candidate to be the referent of the pronoun. Such cases are not merely cases where there is no *specific* or *unique* candidate for being the semantic value of the supplementive in context. They are cases where at least from the hearers’ perspective there just doesn’t seem to be any candidate at all.<sup>26</sup> In such cases, the context doesn’t provide any information at all about the intended semantic value of the supplementive. These are the sorts of cases that Tonhauser et al [2013] take to be diagnostic for SCF effects. Call such cases *catastrophic failures*.<sup>27</sup> The intuitive mark of a catastrophic failure is that if a hearer were asked about the semantic value of the supplementive in question (in the case of 4, “Who was the speaker referring to with ‘He’?”), she would have no idea how to respond. 4 and similar examples show that *in cases of catastrophic failure*, pronouns exhibit strong SCF effects.

However, it appears that *all* supplementives exhibit SCF effects (infelicity) in cases of catastrophic failure, though we’ll see that there is some variation in how extreme the effects are.<sup>28</sup> I’ll order the discussion of my examples from those with the most extreme SCF effects to those with the least.

Pronouns (and demonstratives) would come first since they exhibit the most extreme SCF effects. Since we have discussed them, we begin with relational expressions that take implicit arguments. Suppose my wife and I are sitting quietly in a café working on some papers and there is no history of discussing any task, action or event Sophie might be preparing for. I suddenly say:

5. \*Sophie is ready.

We have catastrophic failure for the contextually supplied implicit argument for ‘ready’ here. The result is severe infelicity.

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<sup>26</sup> Beaver and von Stechow [2013a,b] note this. Perhaps we would want to include here cases in which there are so many candidates that there may as well not be one. But perhaps not.

<sup>27</sup> I echo Yablo’s [2006] notion of (*non*-)catastrophic presupposition failure here, though my notion of catastrophic failure is different from Yablo’s. Catastrophic presupposition failure for Yablo is presupposition failure that renders the sentence with the presupposition not truth evaluable. My notion, by contrast, applies only to contextually sensitive expressions—supplementives—and is a matter of a use of such an expression having no candidate for being its semantic value in context from the hearer’s perspective. The term ‘catastrophic failure’ is apparently used in engineering as well: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catastrophic\\_failure](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catastrophic_failure).

<sup>28</sup> Possible exceptions to this are supplementives like ‘local’ or ‘might’ that very easily default to favored values. E.g. if I use ‘local’ and there are no indications to the contrary, its semantic value defaults to the location of the conversation; a similar use of (unembedded) ‘might’ defaults to targeting the speaker’s knowledge (or at least hearers will take them to so default). But then this means that for such expressions we just can’t produce catastrophic failures. Hence they really may not be exceptions to the claim that all supplementives produce SCF effects in cases of catastrophic failures.

We find the same phenomenon with ‘only’. Suppose my wife and I are sitting quietly in a café working on papers. Call our context *c*. There has been no discussion of any of our friends, any law firms or any group who might have taken the bar exam this year. There has been no discussion of this year’s bar exam, though *c* entails that it is given every year and some people pass. I say:

6. \*Only Mary passed the bar exam this year.

Again, here we have catastrophic failure, since there is no viable candidate to be the alternative set for ‘Only’ in 6 relative to *c*.<sup>29</sup> Again, we get infelicity.

Similar remarks apply to possessives. My wife and I are yet again quietly sitting in a café working. There has been no discussion of how Susie might be related to any car nor any discussion of cars. The context entails that Susie owns no car.<sup>30</sup> I say:

7. \*Susie’s car is fast.

Here we have catastrophic failure with respect to the semantic value of the possessive. Hence, SCF effects.

Next consider quantifier domain restriction. Suppose I am sitting quietly with my wife in a café where we are both working on papers. There is no history of any group being discussed, nor of travel being discussed etc. I say:

8. \*Everyone went to Dubrovnik.

Here we have a catastrophic failure for the implicit restriction on the quantifier. Again, this is *very* infelicitous as a result.

The pattern here is quite robust: catastrophic failures with supplementives generally give rise to SCF effects. The final two constructions I’ll consider tolerate catastrophic failures better than the constructions considered so far, though I still think we see SCF effects. These are tense and gradable adjectives. Let’s take tense first.

In the case of tense, it is hard to show that we get SCF effects in cases of catastrophic failure in part because it is hard to produce examples in which there *is* catastrophic failure: that is, in which there is *no* candidate to be the semantic value of the tense (the time or temporal interval being talked about). One reason for this is that often the sentence in which the tense occurs gives us at least *some* information about what time or time interval the speaker is talking about. Take Partee’s [1973] famous example:

9. John went to a private school.

Partee notes that this sentence can be felicitously uttered even if context doesn’t make clear exactly what time or time interval is being targeted by the tense. Still, this

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<sup>29</sup> I am presupposing a semantics on which ‘only’ gets assigned an *alternative set* in context and a sentence like ‘Only Mary  $\phi$ -ed’ is true in context *c* that assigns the alternative set {Mary, Susie, Matt} to ‘Only’ iff Mary  $\phi$ -ed and no other member of the alternative set  $\phi$ -ed. I discuss this further below.

<sup>30</sup> I stipulate this to prevent ‘Susie’s car’ from defaulting to meaning *the car Susie owns*, as it naturally would absent such a stipulation (at least from the hearer’s perspective). See note 28.



doesn't look to be an example of catastrophic failure. In typical uses, speakers and hearers will have *some* idea of what time intervals are candidates to be the semantic value of the tense in context in virtue of knowing when in their lives people typically are in school, how old John is, etc. Second, even absent such information, the time interval consisting of John's birth up until now is a candidate to be the semantic value here and something similar will be true of many other cases (e.g. 'John visited Holland'). Third, in many uses of past and future tense, the time interval consisting of the *entire* past or future (or a big chunk thereof) will be a candidate for being the semantic value of the tense, preventing catastrophic failure (e.g. 'The earth was formed from the solar nebula.'). Hence, to get catastrophic failure with tense requires finding a sentence that doesn't give information about when the thing being described occurred, doesn't talk about an object whose "life span" picks out a time interval, and which is used in a context in which the entire past or future doesn't seem like a good candidate to be the semantic value of the tense in that context. In such cases, I think we do see SCF effects. Consider this attempt at such a case. My wife and I are working quietly in a café in Paris. There has been no prior discussion of particular times, no discussion of the Parisian restaurant L'Arpège or of any time we might be going out to dinner, etc. I say:

10. \*L'Arpège will be open.<sup>31</sup>

Or suppose that my wife and I are working quietly in a café. Though, I had owned cars most of my adult life, since moving to New York nine years ago, I have not had a car. There has been no previous discussion of cars I owned, or particular times in my past. I say:

11. \*I owned a car.

In both cases here we appear to get catastrophic failure and some degree of infelicity.<sup>32</sup> So even in the case of tense, a catastrophic failure leads to SCF effects. It does seem to me that the infelicity here is less severe than in the cases of previous examples and I'll return to this below.

The final case I'll consider is that of gradable adjectives. As with tense, it is hard to show that catastrophic failures with gradable adjectives give rise to SCF effects. Again here, the reason is that it is difficult to get catastrophic failures with gradable adjectives. One reason is that if e.g. I point at a glass of water and say

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<sup>31</sup> Thanks to Philippe Schlenker for suggesting that using stative predicates would make for infelicitous sentences in cases in which it is unclear what time or time interval is being assigned to the tense in the sentence in context.

<sup>32</sup> Some might think that 10 and 11 are infelicitous simply because they seem a bit off the wall and out of the blue ("why did you all of a sudden start talking about L'Arpège being open/owning a car?"). But note that if I add 'this Saturday' to 10 the remark still seems a bit off the wall ("why are you saying that now?"), but to my ear at least, the infelicity is dramatically reduced. Similarly if I add 'ten years ago' to 11. So the infelicity of 10 and 11 can't result simply from their being a bit off the wall out of the blue. That it is completely unclear what times/time intervals I am targeting must be contributing to their infelicity.

‘That is cold.’, it will be pretty clear that the relevant standard here is *being cold for a glass of water*. Though it may be a bit unclear *exactly* what the standard is here, we have some idea of what the candidates are and so don’t get catastrophic failure. Similar remarks apply to lots of other cases (saying a car is fast, a person is tall, etc. etc.). Indeed, I think that gradable adjectives show the *least* extreme SCF effects of any construction and I’ll discuss this more below. But here is a case that seems to me to give rise to SCF effects. Suppose I am hired to help out some psychologists on a project they are working on. Professor Crastasq takes me into a room where natural numbers are streaming by one at a time on a computer screen. There has been no prior discussion at all of numbers, what it is to be a large or small number or etc. I am told that the natural numbers streaming by can be indefinitely large and that they are being randomly generated. Crastasq sets me the following task and rushes out of the room before I can ask anything:

12. Check marks go above any number that is large.

Claim: this instruction crashes for me in the sense that I have no idea what to do.<sup>33</sup> So here we see the most subtle of SCF effects for supplementives: as a result of having no idea what degree of largeness a number must exceed in this context to count as large, it is patently obvious that I cannot carry out the task assigned to me. It is true that 12 sounds significantly less infelicitous than e.g. 5–8 and that needs to be explained. But the fact that the instruction 12 crashes pretty hard here is a sign of catastrophic failure and the resulting SCF effects.

To repeat, then, all the supplementives I’ve considered give rise to SCF effects. We just need to consider cases of catastrophic failure of the sort that illustrate how *pronouns* show SCF effects. So far, I have remained neutral on the question of what the correct metaseantics for supplementives is—that is, I have remained neutral on the question of what the mechanism is by means of which supplementives secure semantic values in context. This is because to this point I have simply been arguing that all supplementives exhibit SCF effects in cases of catastrophic failure. And it seems to me that whatever your metaseantics is for supplementives, you will have to agree to this. I wish to continue remain as neutral as possible on what the correct metaseantics for supplementives is. So far I’ve said that cases of catastrophic failure are cases in which *from the hearer’s perspective there is no candidate for being the semantic value in context of the supplementive*. I’ll flag here that I believe that in addition we should say that *no semantic value has been secured for the supplementive in question*. Though I won’t argue the point here, I think this is both intuitively plausible and supported by theoretical considerations.<sup>34</sup> I’ll come back to this near the end of the paper.

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<sup>33</sup> Thanks to Roger Schwarzschild for suggesting this sort of example based on his experience of being given a similarly “crashy” instruction on his first day on the job of sorting melons in a melon packing factory he once worked in.

<sup>34</sup> See King [2013, 2014a] for a defense of these claims in the case of demonstratives.

## 5. All Supplementives Allow Cases of Felicitous Underspecification

I now wish to argue that all supplementives have felicitous uses in cases in which hearers are not able to identify a unique intended semantic value for the supplementive in context. Call a case of this sort a case of *felicitous underspecification*. There are in fact two sorts of cases that we might wish to call cases of felicitous underspecification. In the first, though speakers intend a unique semantic value for a supplementive in context, context doesn't supply enough information for hearers to identify it. Gradable adjectives readily provide examples of this sort. Suppose I strike up a conversation with strangers in a bar. As we talk, we discover that we have a common acquaintance Ross. It comes up that I have met Ross' sister Vicky and they have not. They are curious about her and ask what she is like. I say:

13. Vicky is smart.

and go on to describe Vicky in other ways. Suppose that I have in mind a very precise standard for being smart here, as I am an IQ tester and know Vicky's IQ unbeknownst to my new friends. This utterance can be felicitous for all parties even though my audience is not in a position to identify anything like the unique standard for smartness I intend.<sup>35</sup> I'm interested in more radical cases. Suppose there is a case in which a supplementive is used felicitously, and not only can the hearers not identify a unique intended semantic value for the use but the speaker does not intend a unique semantic value nor does anything else appear to secure a unique semantic value for the supplementive in context. I want to argue that all supplementives have uses of this sort. These are the cases that I will call cases of felicitous underspecification. As stated, being a case of felicitous underspecification does not rule out it being a case of catastrophic failure as well. However, I have hypothesized that all cases of supplementives involving catastrophic failure are infelicitous. If that is right, cases of felicitous underspecification are not cases of catastrophic failure.

I now turn to the argument that all supplementives allow cases of felicitous underspecification. In considering cases of felicitous underspecification, I'll proceed from those constructions that most readily allow it to those that most strongly resist it.

We begin with tense. Consider again the tense example from Partee [1973] discussed above and repeated here:

9. John went to a private school.

The idea is that we can imagine a felicitous use of 9, where there need be no specific, unique time or time interval determined as the semantic value of the tense. The speaker may not be in the epistemic position to intend any specific time or time interval; and the hearers can be in the same epistemic situation as the speaker in this regard. Further, it is hard to see what other feature of the context could fix a specific time or time interval. Hence such a use constitutes a felicitous underspecified

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<sup>35</sup> But then is this a case of catastrophic failure? No. From the fact that they know I am talking about a person (as opposed to a dog) they have some ballpark idea about what would be candidates for being thresholds for being smart here.

use of a tense.<sup>36</sup> However, as indicated earlier, in a typical use of 9, speaker and hearer will both have *some*, and maybe even a *pretty good*, idea of what times or time intervals are candidates for being the semantic value of the tense. I am supposing that in cases of catastrophic failure the hearer has very little if any idea of what are the candidates for being the semantic value of the supplementive in question. So, as I indicated before this is not a case of catastrophic failure. Further, and I'll return to this point below, crucially, we tend to hear this example in such a way that we imagine it uttered in a context in which what is important is that John attended a private (say, as opposed to public) school, not *when* he did so. This means that given the conversational purposes this sentence is likely to serve, exactly what time interval is being targeted by the tense is not very important.<sup>37</sup>

In the case just considered I gave examples of candidate time intervals for being the semantic value of the tense in context to rule out 9 taken in context being an example of catastrophic failure. Similarly, in the other cases of felicitous underspecification to follow, I will mention candidate semantic values in context for the supplementive to rule out the case being a catastrophic failure.

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<sup>36</sup> Philippe Schlenker (p.c.) worried that Partee's 9 may not be an example of a deictic use of a tense at all, and so may not be an example of felicitous underspecification—a case in which a supplementive is not assigned a unique semantic value in context and the sentence containing it is nonetheless felicitous in that context. Schlenker thought that 9 may simply be an existentially quantified use of a tense, in which case there simply is no supplementive here. As he pointed out to me, though the simple past often has readings that feel like existential quantification with non-statives, this is not so with statives. So if the tense in the first of the following two sentences is not assigned a specific time the sentence is fine but the second is a bit deviant if no specific time is assigned to the tense:

John left.  
John was sick.

Hence the tenses in stative examples appear to be the best candidates for being deictic uses of tense. Can we get felicitous underspecification with tenses in sentences with stative predicates? I believe so. Suppose you have just expressed frustration with some policies of the Catholic Church. Though we have both heard of Galileo, neither of us has much of an idea when he lived. I agree that the Church has done some bad things and say:

Galileo knew the earth orbited the sun and the Catholic Church made him deny it.

This sentence is perfectly felicitous even though plausibly no specific time or time interval is assigned to the tense. The speaker isn't in an epistemic situation to intend any specific time or time interval and the hearer cannot provide one either. It is difficult to see what other feature of the context of utterance could supply a specific time or time interval either. So here we have a felicitous use of a tense, where it is plausibly used deictically and has not been assigned a unique semantic value. So this is a felicitous underspecified use of tense. I'll continue to assume that Partee's 9 is as well, so that it is a deictic use of tense, despite Schlenker's worries. It is worth recalling that Partee thought that just as the deictic tense in 9 is not assigned a unique value while 9 remains felicitous, so in a sentence like 'They haven't installed my phone yet.' the pronoun 'They' may not be assigned a unique value and yet the sentence may be felicitous.

<sup>37</sup> One might think that the felt difference between 'John went to a private school.' and 'John went to a private school then' shows that there is a difference between a variable like 'then' and the tense "variable" in terms of the kind of value each requires. It can seem like 'then' requires a more specific value than the tense does. But this, I think, is an illusion. Consider 'John went to a private school. He was very arrogant then.' Here 'then' picks up exactly the vague, unspecific "value" of the tense in the prior sentence. I think that the difference between things like 'then' and the tense "variable" is rather like the difference between when anaphoric definite descriptions and pronouns are licensed: \*'John got married. She is beautiful.' vs. 'John got married. His wife is beautiful.' Thanks to Roger Schwarzschild for discussion here.

Turning now to gradable adjectives, I think it is particularly easy to find felicitous underspecified uses of them.<sup>38</sup> In January, I went out for a walk in Central Park. I saw no thermometers, nor did I read or hear any reports on the weather. The next day I say to my wife and some friends:

14. Yesterday was cold.

I am assuming a degree theoretic treatment of the positive form of gradable adjectives of the sort championed in Kennedy [2007] here. Specifically, I am taking 14 to be true in my context iff the degree of coldness of the day before the day of utterance is below the degree of coldness determined in that context that is the threshold for coldness in that context.<sup>39</sup> It is easy to imagine that there is no *specific* degree in this context that I intended to be the threshold for being cold nor that my wife took me to intend. Further, it is hard to see what other features of context could fix the relevant degree. So it seems we have a felicitous underspecified use.<sup>40</sup> But of course my wife and I both will have *some* idea of what candidate thresholds for ‘cold’ would be in talking about a wintry, snowy day.

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<sup>38</sup> Beaver and von Stechow [2013a] note that ‘tall’ can be felicitously used in contexts in which no unique standard is secured.

<sup>39</sup> Even more specifically, gradable adjectives denote *measure functions*: functions that map individuals to degrees (type  $\langle e, d \rangle$ ). These degrees are totally ordered with respect to some dimension given by the adjectives meaning, yielding a *scale*. Adjectives combine with degree morphology resulting in something that denotes a property of or relation between individuals. In the positive form (‘is tall’), the degree morpheme is a null morpheme *pos*. Hence, syntactically, the positive form of the adjective with degree morpheme looks as follows:

$[_{DegP}[_{Deg}pos] [_{AP}tall]]$

The semantics for *pos* is:  $\|pos\|^c = \lambda g \lambda x.g(x) > d_c$ , where  $d_c$  is a degree of tallness determined in context  $c$  and  $g$  is an adjective meaning (measure function). Thus  $\|[_{DegP}[_{Deg}pos] [_{AP}tall]]\|^c = \lambda x.tall(x) > d_c$  (where **tall** is the measure function denoted by ‘tall’). An individual  $o$  has this property just in case the height **tall** assigns to  $o$  is greater than the degree of height  $d_c$  determined in the context  $c$ . So a sentence like

John is tall.

is true in context  $c$  just in case: **tall** (John)  $> d_c$

<sup>40</sup> An anonymous referee suggested that perhaps interlocutors can give a *de dicto* characterization of the relevant degree along the lines of *whatever the typical low temperature is for this time of year in New York* and that this preserves felicity. This strikes me as very implausible in many, many cases including the present one. In the case in question neither I nor my wife had any idea about what is a typical low temperature for New York in January. Hence I would not want to commit myself to the claim that the degree of coldness on the day in question was below the degree of coldness of a typical low temperature day in January in New York. More generally, the idea that in any case in which there is not a specific degree assigned to the positive form of a felicitously used gradable adjective as its semantic value in context, there will always be a *de dicto* characterization of a specific degree somehow supplied in context seems to me extremely implausible. Just think of your own uses of adjectives in all the cases in which you say something or someone is fast, nice, smart, old, interesting and so on. In ever so many cases, it seems clear no specific degree on the relevant scale is intended by the speaker or delivered by any other feature of the context. Is it really plausible that in *every such case* context somehow supplies a *de dicto* characterization of the relevant specific degree? At any rate, that is an incredibly strong claim that advocates of this strategy need to give us some very good reason to believe. This same strategy could be appealed to in other cases below, but I think that the consideration adduced here apply across the board and so I ignore it in what follows.

Next, consider possessives. Sophie and I are skiing together with a group of other people and the context entails that she is riding a pair of skis she made for herself. Noticing that she is skiing well, I say:

15. Sophie's skis are really working for her.

Again, it seems easy to imagine that in uttering as I did my intentions failed to distinguish between the following relations, each of which is a candidate for being the semantic value of the possessive: *x owns y*, *x made y*, *x is riding y*. Further, as before it doesn't seem as though any other feature of the context could decide between these candidate relations. So here again: a felicitous underspecified use.

Turning now to 'only', I am assuming that uses of 'only' are assigned *alternative sets* in context. So 'Only John  $\phi$ -ed.' is true in context *c* just in case John  $\phi$ -ed and no other member of the alternative set assigned to 'only' in *c* (say, {John, Susie, Matt})  $\phi$ -ed. Hence, the semantic value in context of 'only' will be such an alternative set. Hearing Ted Cruz famously compare his denial of the well-established fact that the climate is warming to what he claimed was Galileo's denial that the Earth is flat<sup>41</sup>, I turned to my wife and said:

16. Only Ted Cruz compares himself to Galileo.

Surely it may be that nothing in the context of utterance fixed a unique alternative set for my utterance. After all, I didn't intend the alternative set to include everyone since Galileo's birth or even everyone currently in the world, since it is very likely that others made Galileo/self comparisons. Of course a number of candidate alternative sets spring to mind: *politicians in the current election cycle*, *prominent people in the US* and so on. But it is extremely unclear what precise group I intended to be the alternative set and extremely unclear what my wife took the alternative set to be. Further, there doesn't seem to be any other feature(s) of the context that could fix the alternative set. What would it/they be? And yet the utterance was perfectly felicitous. So here we have a felicitous underspecified use of 'only'.

Before turning to the hard cases, let's look at relational expressions taking implicit arguments. Susie and Matt are planning to go to lunch with baby Molly. They plan to take a brief walk to the park before driving to lunch. They are not entirely sure what they will do after that, though there is some possibility of a trip to the coffee shop and some shopping. They go through their various preparations. Fully dressed, and eyeing baby Molly in her car seat, Susie proudly says:

17. Molly is ready.

It seems clear that we can imagine 17 uttered in a context in which there was nothing that determined whether the required argument here is *to go to the park, for the day's activities, to go to lunch, to go outside*, and so on. Susie need not have intended one of these as opposed to the others, and Matt need not have taken her to intend any one of these. Nor does it seem that anything else in the context need have fixed a unique

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<sup>41</sup> Cruz, of course, was quite confused. In fact, Galileo denied that the Earth was stationary. It has been known that the Earth is round at least since the time of the ancient Greeks.

argument for ‘ready’ here. But this needn’t impugn the felicity of the utterance. So we have a felicitous underspecified use of a relational expression with an implicit argument.

Finally, the hard cases: singular pronouns and demonstratives. Here I will be less brief than in previous cases and give a fair number of examples because I have found that philosophers are particularly resistant to the claim that that singular pronouns and demonstratives have felicitous underspecified uses.<sup>42</sup> Hence, they try to explain away any alleged examples. Let me illustrate this. Suppose six of us order new tablets of identical brand and model. They all arrive at the same time together in a big box that our IT tech gives to us. While she watches, we open the box to discover six identical tablets of the wrong brand. I jump up pointing at the large box and protest to the tech:

18. That is not the tablet I ordered.

It seems easy to imagine the case in such a way that nothing in the context determines that my use of ‘that’ has its semantic value one of the tablets as opposed to any other. Certainly, I need not have intended a specific tablet. But my utterance is nonetheless felicitous. So this looks to be a felicitous underspecified use of a demonstrative. However, someone might attempt to resist this conclusion by saying that here it isn’t that ‘That’ fails to have a semantic value in context since it is indeterminate which *particular* tablet is its semantic value. Rather, here ‘That’ has as its semantic value the *kind/type* of tablet in the box. So, it could be claimed, the use is not underspecified. We’ll want to try to choose examples where this move isn’t available. I’ll also try to use examples that differ from each other significantly to avoid reliance on any one specific kind of case. It seems to me that the number and variety of examples I provide here should convince even the staunchest skeptic about felicitous underspecified uses of singular pronouns and demonstratives.<sup>43</sup>

The first example exploits the fact just canvassed: that demonstratives can have as their semantic values types or tokens.<sup>44</sup> We are shopping for expensive cars. At one dealership, we are looking a row of identical beautiful sports cars some distance away. The dealer jumps in one of the cars and drives it right up in front of us and gets out smiling. Looking at the car in front of us, you say

19. That is a beautiful car.

It seems easy to imagine that nothing about your intentions in uttering or anything else in the context fixes *the car token* as opposed to *the car type* as the semantic value of your use of the demonstrative. With respect to the former point, one bit of

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<sup>42</sup> Thanks to Josh Dever for helpful discussion here. His comments prompted much of the material over the next several pages.

<sup>43</sup> It is worth adding that it is easy to get felicitous underspecified uses of *plural* demonstratives and deictic pronouns by considering cases in which I use them to say something about a group whose “boundaries are indeterminate.” Suppose I am at a concert and from a distance I see a group of people dancing wildly in front of the stage. Pointing in their general direction, I say ‘They seem to be having fun.’ It is easy to imagine the case in such a way that there is no unique group that is singled out as the semantic value of my use of ‘They’ in this context by my intentions or anything else. I believe such examples were originally suggested to me by Thony Gillies. See also note 36.

<sup>44</sup> Thanks to Sam Cumming for suggesting this kind of case.

evidence is that it could be the case that no matter which of the following responses I make, you will not feel as though I was talking about something different than you were:

19a. Yes, *and* it was the first Italian commercial sports car to go zero to sixty in under 2.5 seconds.

19b. Oh, but unfortunately it has a scratch on the hood.

But clearly in 19a, 'it' has as its semantic value a car type and in 19b a car token. The fact that you need not feel as though I am talking about something different from what you were talking about in your initial utterance whether I utter 19a or 19b is evidence that you didn't determinately intend your use of 'that' to have either the type or the token as its semantic value.

Perhaps someone will insist that in uttering 19 you *must* have intended exactly one of the car type or the car token. But I don't know why anyone would think this must be the case in the situation above unless she thought that *anytime* one uses 'That' to have as its semantic value a car, shirt, book and so on, it simply *cannot be the case* that she hasn't intended exactly one of a type or a token. After all, if she could do it in any such case, my point is made whether you do so in uttering 19 or not. But what would be the argument for the *very* strong claim that one cannot use 'that' to have as its semantic value a car, book, shirt or any other kind of thing without explicitly intending exactly one of the type or the token? I have no idea what such an argument would like. But then given that in cases like 19, it does appear that the speaker's intentions don't single out either the type or the token as the semantic value for 'That' and we have no argument that they do, we should accept that they don't.

As to whether something else in the context determines that the car type or car token is univocally the semantic values of 'That' in context in 19, it is hard to see what would do this. It seems to me, then, that we have a good case that 19 is an example of a felicitous underspecified use of a demonstrative.

Second example.<sup>45</sup> Molly is picking through a large barrel of apples trying to find the perfect one. Mother Susie sees her doing this, and before Molly makes a choice, Susie says:

20. You'll need to wash that before you eat it.

Here it seems clear that no particular apple is the semantic value of 'that' in this context. Yet the sentence is perfectly felicitous. Of course, one might try to claim that 'that' refers at the time of utterance to whatever apple Molly subsequently picks. But even this, to my mind, desperate strategy won't work since the utterance is perfectly felicitous even if Molly subsequently changes her mind and decides to remain apple free.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, even if in such a case Susie and Molly both know in advance that Molly often looks through apples in this way and usually fails to pick one, the utterance is felicitous. So here again we have a felicitous underspecified use of a demonstrative.

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<sup>45</sup> Thanks to Annie Papreck King for the example.

<sup>46</sup> Indeed, if Molly is averse to washing things, she might even give her mother's admonishment 20 as her reason for not picking an apple, saying 'Okay then, I won't have one.'



For a third example, imagine that I ask you to meet me at a bar late at night. I pull a photograph out of my bag and hand it to you. It is a slightly blurry photograph of the new Chinese stealth fighter in flight. Though people have heard about the plane, no one in the West has seen it. You are an expert on military aircraft. I say

21. Do you know what this is?

Now it seems easy to imagine that nothing in the context determines whether the photograph or the Chinese fighter is the semantic value of ‘this’ in 21. As with 19 above, one bit of evidence for this is that if you respond in either of the following two ways, I need not feel as though you are talking about a different thing than I was in using ‘this’:

21a. Yes, it is a photograph of the new Chinese stealth fighter. How in the world did you get this?

21b. Yes, it is the new Chinese stealth fighter. How in the world did you get a picture of it?

But this suggests that again we have a felicitous underspecified use of a demonstrative.

For a final example of a felicitous underspecified use of a singular demonstrative, consider a case in which we are trying to recall a place we stayed in Southern California several years ago. I say:

22. What was that place we stayed in Southern California a few years ago?

Here it seems clear that I need not intend any specific location at all. That is, I might be open to you answering with the name of a county (‘Southern Orange County’), a town (‘San Clemente’) or a neighborhood (‘Riviera’).<sup>47</sup> In this sense my use of ‘that place we stayed in Southern California a few years ago’ isn’t even associated with a *de dicto* characterization that uniquely specifies a location since my intentions don’t determine whether a descriptive condition like *the place we stayed in Southern California a few years ago* should be taken to pick out a county, city or neighborhood. Further, I can’t really intend any of these specific locations since I don’t recall any of them. Finally, it is hard to see what else about the context could uniquely fix the semantic value of my use of a demonstrative. So here again it appears that we have a felicitous underspecified use of a demonstrative.

Turning to singular pronouns, for a first example imagine that we are in pirate waters on our sailing ship. We have from time to time observed an ominous black ship apparently trailing us. We happen to know that the local pirates are a democratic lot, and take turns commanding and steering the ship. We wake up one morning and you spot the ominous ship. You comment:

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<sup>47</sup> This is rather like an example from Gillies and von Stechow [2011] that they attribute to Chris Potts (p.c.) in which Billy meets Alex at a conference and says to her ‘Where are you from?’. Gillies and von Stechow imagine that the case is one in which Billy just wants to know a bit more about Alex and in which Billy didn’t intend to be asking Alex where she is currently on sabbatical, nor where she currently teaches, nor where she went to grad school nor where she grew up. Billy is just throwing a very indeterminate question out there and leaving it up to Alex which (exact) question to answer.

23. He's shadowing us again.

Again, it is easy to imagine the context being such that nothing secures any pirate, the ship itself, or any specific thing as the semantic value of the pronoun (e.g. suppose that helmsman and captain change exactly when you utter 'He'). But the utterance is perfectly felicitous. So here we have felicitous underspecification with a singular pronoun.

For a second example, suppose that we live in an apartment building and have three handymen who work on the building: Don, Tim and Kenny. We have a light that needs fixing and have put in an email request to have it fixed. When the handymen get such requests, one of them takes the job depending on what other jobs each is doing. This is well known to us. On two previous occasions, the handyman failed to show up at the appointed time to fix the light. We emailed a request in again yesterday and today was our third appointment. I have been at work all day. I come through the front door and see that the light once again hasn't been touched and that you are sitting on the couch in plain sight of the light. Exasperated, I say:

24. Are you kidding me? He didn't show up again!#?

This looks to be felicitous even if we don't know which of Don, Tim or Kenny got the job and even if we don't know who was given the job on the previous two occasions. So here again it does not look like a unique semantic value was secured for 'He' in the context as described and we again have a felicitous underspecified use of a singular pronoun.

A third example of a felicitous unspecified use of a singular pronoun concerns a case in which Molly is excitedly waiting for a package from Aunt Annie that she knows will contain the new set of Legos she has been coveting. Every day she checks the mail eagerly, hoping that the package has arrived. She and the other members of her family having been tirelessly talking about when the package will arrive, alternately and indifferently talking about the arrival of *the package from Aunt Annie* and the arrival of *the Empire State Building Lego set*. The package/Lego set is now well overdue. Mother Susie comes home from work, walks in the door and says to Molly:

25. Did it come today?

It seems easy to imagine that in uttering 'it' Susie failed to determinately intend as its semantic value in context the Lego set as opposed to the package from Annie. As a result, it is easy to imagine that whether Molly replies 'Do you mean the Lego set?' or 'Do you mean the package from Annie?', Susie could answer 'Yes' thinking she was speaking the truth. Finally, it doesn't seem as though anything else in the context of utterance fixes a unique semantic value for Susie's use of 'it'. So again it appears that we have a felicitous underspecified use of a singular pronoun.

A final example of a felicitous underspecified use of a singular pronoun mirrors the apple example above. As before, Molly is looking through a large barrel of apples and trying to find the perfect one. As before, Mother Susie notices and before Molly chooses says:

26. You'll need to wash it before you eat it.<sup>48</sup>

The considerations adduced above in the case of 20 suggest that here too we have a felicitous underspecified use of a singular pronoun.

I've now argued that all supplementives I have considered have felicitous underspecified uses<sup>49</sup> and display SCF effects. The fact that all supplementives exhibit SCF effects in cases of catastrophic failure allows us to explain SCF effects in such cases by appealing to a single metasemantics for supplementives. Recall that I said earlier that I thought it was plausible that not only can hearers not find a plausible candidate for being the semantic value in such cases, but that in addition in cases of this sort the metasemantics yields no semantic value for the supplementive in question. Indeed, it seems plausible to say that in such cases the metasemantics fails radically in the sense that we are not even given candidates for being the semantic value. If that's right, we could explain the tremendous infelicity in such cases by appealing to the fact that the metasemantic mechanism fails radically in such cases. For the remainder of the paper, I'll assume that supplementives do not have semantic values in context in the case of catastrophic failure.

## 6. Some Loose Ends

Beaver and von Stechow [2013a,b] raise the question of why SCF effects can't be eliminated by accommodation. I think in the case of SCF effects resulting from catastrophic failure, there is an obvious answer. What would have to be accommodated e.g. in the case of a pronoun would be the claim that it refers to *e* for some specific *e*. But precisely because the case is one of catastrophic failure, there are no candidates for *e* from the audience's perspective and so the audience is not in an epistemic position to accommodate. Similar remarks apply to other supplementives in cases of catastrophic failure.<sup>50</sup>

Two questions remain. First, I mentioned above that the metasemantics I favor holds that a context is inappropriate for an LF if a supplementive in the LF is not assigned a unique semantic value in the context. But this means that in cases of felicitous underspecification, a sentence is felicitous in an inappropriate context. Something needs to be said about this. Second, though supplementives exhibit similar behavior in exhibiting SCF effects and allowing cases of felicitous underspecification, there are differences in how supplementives behave in these respects. This needs to be explained.

Beginning with the second point here, I can summarize my judgments about the differences in behavior of supplementives as follows:

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<sup>48</sup> Could the pronoun here have a reading on which it has the semantic value of something like the definite description 'the apple you pick'? I don't think so. Note that following 26 with 'You never wash it before you eat it.' sounds very weird, as does 'You never do.' However if we explicitly use a definite description the continuations are fine: 'You'll need to wash the apple you pick before you eat it. You never wash the apple you pick./You never do.' Similar remarks apply to 24. Thanks to Philippe Schlenker and an anonymous referee for discussion.

<sup>49</sup> King [2014b] gives examples to show this for singular pronouns and demonstratives as well.

<sup>50</sup> In general, I am imagining that what would have to be accommodated for a given use of a supplementive *S* in context *c* is the claim that *S*'s value in *c* is *e*, for some specific *e*. In cases of catastrophic failure, hearers simply aren't in the epistemic position to adjust the common ground in this way.

	CF	FU	SCF
Pronouns/demonstratives	easy	hard	severe
Relational expressions	fairly easy	not too hard	severe- <sup>51</sup>
Possessives	fairly easy	not too hard	severe-
‘Only’	fairly easy	not too hard	severe-
Quantifiers	fairly easy	not too hard	severe-
Tense	hard	easy	mild
Gradable adjectives	hard	easy	mild

The first line claims that for pronouns, it is **easy** to get catastrophic failure, **hard** to get cases of felicitous underspecification and that SCF effects are **severe** in the sense of the relevant sentences being *very* infelicitous in cases of catastrophic failures. The last line indicates that for gradable adjectives it is **hard** to construct cases of catastrophic failure, **easy** to construct cases of felicitous underspecification and that SCF effects are **mild**. Looking at the chart, it appears that when it is easy to get catastrophic failure, it is difficult to get cases of felicitous underspecification and SCF effects are very pronounced. It also appears that as it becomes more difficult to get cases of catastrophic failure, cases of felicitous underspecification become easier and SCF effects become milder. This makes at least some intuitive sense. If a supplementive tolerates well cases in which no unique semantic value has been secured for it in context—that is, tolerates well cases of felicitous underspecification—it stands to reason that that it will be harder to find cases in which the lack of a specific semantic value in context leads to infelicity. Hence, we would expect expressions for which cases of felicitous underspecification are easy to exhibit mild SCF effects.

In terms of explaining *why* supplementives differ in the ways claimed in the above chart, let’s begin with the question of how to think of cases in which supplementives fail to have unique semantic values in context. As I’ve indicated, I believe supplementives are governed by a single metasemantics: there is a single mechanism by means of which supplementives secure semantic values in context.<sup>52</sup> In some cases, that mechanism fails to secure a unique semantic value for the supplementive. In cases of felicitous underspecification, I believe that the mechanism delivers something like a *range* of candidates for being the semantic value.<sup>53</sup> In cases of catastrophic failure, the mechanism fails to do even this, with the result being infelicity (to some degree). So as to the differences in behavior, the question is why some expressions tolerate not having unique semantic values in context (having a range of candidate values instead) so much better than others. My hope is that these differences can be explained by invoking the conversational roles the

<sup>51</sup> ‘Severe –’ indicates that the SCF effects are less severe than the case of pronouns, but still pretty severe. See examples 5–8.

<sup>52</sup> See King [2014b] for a defense of this claim.

<sup>53</sup> An anonymous referee raised the very good question of how to think of what gets expressed in cases in which the metasemantics delivers a range of candidates for being the semantic value of a supplementive in context. Is a proposition expressed/asserted? Multiple propositions corresponding to the range of candidate semantic values? These questions are pressing and need to be answered, but limitations of time and space prevent doing so here. Cf. von Stechow and Gillies’ [2011] discussion of “putting multiple propositions in play” in uttering a sentence containing an unembedded epistemic modal.

various expressions typically play and the conversational purposes they typically serve.

Though I certainly cannot tell such a story for all the expressions considered here, let me say a few things about a couple examples. Let's start with pronouns. In a typical use of a deictic pronoun, the speaker's purpose in employing the device is to focus her audience's attention on a specific object so that she may communicate something about it. Should she fail to focus her audience on a specific object, her communicative purposes will be hopelessly thwarted. That is exactly what we see in cases of catastrophic failure with pronouns and demonstratives. The thought is, then, that pronouns/demonstratives give rise to robust SCF effects and poorly tolerate felicitous underspecification due to the fact that in typical uses, not securing a unique semantic value thoroughly undermines the communicative aims of the speaker. Cases of felicitous underspecification involving pronouns and demonstratives are precisely cases in which singling out a unique semantic value for the expression is not crucial to the communicative aims of the speakers. But for the reasons given, such cases are rather unusual.

At the other end of the spectrum, consider tense. Why does tense give rise to relatively mild SCF effects and why does it tolerate felicitous underspecification so well? One reason is that often when I am relating events in the past or future, it simply isn't important exactly when those events occurred and enough information is provided to give the audience an approximate sense of when they did. Consider Partee's [1973] famous example again: 'John went to a private school.' As indicated above, if one knows much at all about John, one will have a decent idea of when the private-school-attending took place. Further, again as I've already indicated, the primary information one hopes to convey in uttering such a sentence typically does not have to do with *when* the schooling occurred, but rather that a certain *kind* of schooling occurred. In cases like this, conversational purposes are simply not well served by precisely specifying a time interval. Further, in cases in which it *is* important to do so, we have lots of temporal modifiers available to do the job: 'yesterday', 'three weeks ago', 'last year', 'five minutes ago' and so on. But then the use of a tense without such a modifier or an indication that a somewhat specific time is in question (as in an utterance in Penn Station of 'I missed the train.' to my wife on the phone) will signal to the hearer that the exact time isn't important. And when it isn't, it is not surprising that we get cases of felicitous underspecification with tense.

Obviously, these remarks are vague as they stand and so are in need of filling in. But these are the lines along which I would look for an explanation of the differences in the behavior of supplementives with respect to SCF effects and felicitous underspecification. If such explanations are forthcoming, I would expect them to hold cross linguistically. Appealing as they do to very general conversational purposes, one would expect the tenses, pronouns etc. in other languages to exhibit similar behavior. I can't say that I have checked on this except for the case of pronouns. Tonhauser et al. [2013] note that pronouns show SCF effects in Guarani in the same way that they do in English. And Matthewson [2006] shows the same for St'át'imcets (or Northern Interior Salish).

Though I've claimed that how severe a supplementive's SCF effects are is to be explained by the conversational purposes it typically serves, I hasten to add that it could be that in virtue of serving the purpose it typically does, a supplementive comes to lexically encode that it's SCF effects are as extreme or mild as they in fact are. If so, such an expression e.g. may display SCF effects in a case

in which we would not expect it to given the conversational purposes active in that case.

Finally, as I've indicated, the metasemantics I favor, like the textbook/standard account, claims that a context  $c$  is *appropriate* for an LF  $\phi$  only if (unique) semantic values are assigned in  $c$  to all supplementives in  $\phi$ . But this means that cases of felicitous underspecification are cases in which sentences/LFs are felicitous in *inappropriate* contexts. That seems like a bad thing, given that the appropriateness condition seems intended to explain infelicity: when a context  $c$  is inappropriate for an LF  $\phi$ ,  $\phi$  should be infelicitous in  $c$ .

In order to remedy this situation and get a more nuanced account of a context being appropriate for an LF, go back to the idea that a case of felicitous underspecification is a case in which the metasemantics for a supplementives yields a *range* of viable candidates for being the semantic value of a supplementive in context rather than a unique semantic value.<sup>54</sup> As my remarks above suggest, I suspect that what preserves felicity in such cases is that conversational aims and purposes are served well enough by the supplementive being associated with a range of candidate semantic values in context rather than a unique semantic value. To capture these ideas, let's talk of *the degree of resolution of a supplementive in a context* and say that we get the highest degree of resolution in a context when a unique semantic value is secured by the metasemantics. As the range of viable candidates delivered by the metasemantics for being the semantic value for a supplementive increases in a context, let's say that the supplementive's *degree of resolution decreases in that context*. Finally, let's suppose, somewhat artificially, that a context determines *the proper degree of resolution for a given supplementive in that context*. Note that this is *not* given by the metasemantics of supplementives, but is given in some complex way by the conversational aims and purposes active in the context. Note also that it is quite possible that a given context determines e.g. the proper degree of resolution for a pronoun in that context, while determining a quite different proper degree of resolution for a gradable adjective. Indeed, we should expect this. Finally, it may even be that a single context determines different proper degrees of resolution for e.g. two different gradable adjectives. We may be in a context where our communicative aims and purposes require being very precise about *fastness* but allow us to be quite imprecise about *niceness*.

To summarize, then, we must distinguish two things: 1) the *de facto* degree of resolution our metasemantics determines for a supplementive in context  $c$ ; and 2) the *proper* degree of resolution determined for that supplementive in  $c$  given conversational aims and goals in  $c$ . Using 1 and 2, we can reformulate the appropriateness condition as follows:

#### Appropriateness Condition

Context  $c$  is *appropriate* for LF  $\phi$  only if the degree of resolution in  $c$  of every supplementive in  $\phi$  is proper according to  $c$ .<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Thanks to Thony Gillies for very helpful comments and suggestions concerning the ideas in this and the next paragraph.

<sup>55</sup> Note that this would allow a context to be inappropriate for an LF because a supplementive in the LF has in that context a *higher* degree of resolution than the context deems proper. I suspect this is a good thing, but I am not sure. Of course, if it isn't, it would be easy to change the Appropriateness Condition in the relevant way.

The idea is that if  $c$  is appropriate for  $\phi$ , the degree of resolution in  $c$  delivered by the metaseantics for supplementives for each supplementive in  $\phi$  matches the proper degree of resolution  $c$  determines for each supplementive in  $\phi$  by means of the conversational aims and purposes in  $c$ . In short, in an appropriate context  $c$  for an LF the degree of resolution in fact delivered by the metaseantics in  $c$  matches the proper degree of resolution determined by the conversational purposes and aims of  $c$  for each supplementive in the LF.<sup>56</sup>

Our new Appropriateness Condition raises a question about the notion of *catastrophic failure* I've used in the present paper. Consider a case in which an LF  $\phi$  containing a (single) supplementive  $s$  is used in a context  $c$  inappropriate for  $\phi$ . Specifically, suppose the degree of resolution of  $s$  in  $c$  is *lower* than its proper degree of resolution in  $c$ . Does this amount to a case of catastrophic failure? We will get infelicity in such a case. But this doesn't mean that we have catastrophic failure. After all, catastrophic failure is supposed to be a matter of there being *no candidate* for being the semantic value of a supplementive in context. That won't necessarily be the case every time the proper degree of resolution of a supplementive in context exceeds its *de facto* degree of resolution in that context.

Before closing, let me address a question that may have occurred to some readers. Above, I noted that the reason one can't save cases of catastrophic failure by accommodation is that since hearers have no idea what the candidates are for being the semantic value of a supplementive in such a case, he/she cannot adjust the common ground by adding the relevant reference implication: that the use of the supplementive in question has  $e$  as its semantic value, for some specific  $e$ . However, this raises the following question: to what extent should we view cases of felicitous underspecification as involving saving felicity by accommodation? If what was said in the previous paragraph is correct, that would be the wrong way to look at things. It isn't that when a sentence is uttered in a case of felicitous underspecification, something is missing from the common ground that hearers then add "quietly and without fuss".<sup>57</sup> Rather, as we said, in such a case the (less than full) resolution yielded by the metaseantics for the supplementive in question in the context matches the proper degree of resolution for the supplementive determined

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<sup>56</sup> Going back to one of my examples of an infelicitous use of a tense in the case of catastrophic failure:

11. \*I owned a car.

Thony Gillies (p.c.) noted that the example improves dramatically when one makes a minimal change that seems to provide no additional information about what time interval the tense is targeting:

11o. I owned a car once.

I agree with Gillies' judgment here but I think the new Appropriateness Condition and the accompanying notions of proper degree of resolution of a supplementive in context and *de facto* degree of resolution of a supplementive in context actually explain this. Adding 'once' explicitly indicates to the hearer that the exact time of ownership is irrelevant to the topic being initiated with 11o. Hence, this signals that conversational purposes don't require more precision about what time interval is being targeted. In effect, this changes conversational purposes in such a way that the proper degree of resolution for the tense in 11o is lowered to such a point that the tense in 11o's *de facto* degree of resolution in the context matches its proper degree. By contrast, when I initiate a topic with 11 in a usual conversation, my hearer has every reason to expect that conversational purposes will dictate a higher proper degree of resolution for the tense than has been provided by the *de facto* resolution. Thus, infelicity results.

<sup>57</sup> Von Stechow [2008]

by the conversational goals and aims in the context. So it isn't a matter of felicity being saved by hearers *adding* something to the context; felicity results from the context already possessing the properties it requires.

I'll close by discussing SCF and what I take myself to be committed to here. For the purposes of the present paper, I have gone along with Tonhauser et al.'s [2013] characterization of SCF. I have taken e.g. personal pronouns to be SCF triggers and have taken them to project a reference implication to the effect that a given use of a pronoun refers in context *c* to *e*, for some specific entity *e*. If a pronoun is used in a context that doesn't entail such a reference implication for it, we get infelicity that cannot be saved by accommodation (assuming that the proper degree of resolution for the pronoun in the context is maximal). In the end, though, I don't want to be *committed* to this way of understanding the phenomenon and I have at least slight misgivings about it, which I'll get to in a moment.

First, let me address a way Seth Yalcin (p.c.) thought SCF might be understood. Yalcin asked why SCF couldn't just be like cases of a presupposition associated with an uttered sentence being presupposed false in the context of utterance: that is, cases in which a sentence that has a presupposition *P* is used in a context whose common ground entails not *P*. For example, suppose it is common ground that I have no wife. I then say 'My wife is tired.' and we get infelicity. I take it that Yalcin's idea is that e.g. in uttering a sentence with a pronoun where we have catastrophic failure, as in 4 above, the projected content is *that the use of 'He' refers to e, for some specific e* but it is common ground that the pronoun has no referent. The result, again, is infelicity. Yalcin's suggested account of SCF here claims that we get SCF effects in contexts in which a pronoun is used where it is common ground that it has no referent. I don't think such an account can be correct because in many cases of catastrophic failure, with resulting infelicity, it won't be common ground that the pronoun has no referent for two reasons. First, in many cases the speaker won't be presupposing that her pronoun has no referent.<sup>58</sup> She will often think she is being more understandable than she is.<sup>59</sup> So that the pronoun has no referent won't be common ground. Second, *hearers* may not presuppose that the pronoun has no referent in cases of catastrophic failure either. They may be unsure whether they are confused, missed something or etc. Again, as a result that the pronoun has no referent won't be common ground. So I don't think SCF can be understood in the way Yalcin suggested.

Finally, why my misgivings about the way Tonhauser et al. [2013] understand SCF? It is two things. First, the nature of the alleged projected content. Second, the cognitive relation between the alleged projected content and language users. Taking the first point first, in the case of the use of a pronoun, the alleged projected content is the claim that the pronoun refers to some specific thing *e*. But this is just the claim that the pronoun has the sort of content it normally contributes to truth conditions. And one might think that we quite generally take it for granted that *any* words or expressions we use have the sort of content that they normally contribute to truth conditions. That in using a pronoun we take for granted that it has its usual sort of content would then just be an instance of

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<sup>58</sup> Though nothing hangs on it, for simplicity I assume here that the common ground is what all the conversational participants presuppose, mutually recognize that they presuppose, etc.

<sup>59</sup> I sometimes commit cases of catastrophic failure in talking to my wife, thinking something is way more salient than it is.



the fact that we generally take it for granted that speakers and hearers use words and expressions that have the sort of content words and expressions of the sort they are using generally have. If that is right, then it would be strange to think of *pronouns* as triggers for projected content if we are not willing to say the same thing about any other words. The alleged projected content here then starts to look like a different phenomenon from other cases of projected content.

Second, if one lists the family of sentences for paradigm cases of projected content and asks speakers what they all imply, one gets very robust answers. In the following two cases, speakers inevitably reply ‘Jim used to smoke.’ and ‘Sophie just published her first book.’, respectively:

- 1a. Jim stopped smoking.
- 1b. Jim didn’t stop smoking.
- 1c. Jim may have stopped smoking.
- 1d. If Jim stopped smoking, I’ll be surprised.
- 1e. Did Jim stop smoking?
- 3a. Sophie, who just published her first book, lives in Mammoth.
- 3b. Sophie, who just published her first book, doesn’t live in Mammoth.
- 3c. Sophie, who just published her first book, may live in Mammoth.
- 3d. If Sophie, who just published her first book, lives in Mammoth, I’ll visit her in winter.
- 3e. Does Sophie, who just published her first book, live in Mammoth?

However, when I have asked speakers what the following sentences all imply, I generally get quizzical looks:

- 27a. She is smart.
- 27b. She isn’t smart.
- 27c. She may be smart.
- 27d. If she is smart, she will succeed.
- 27e. Is she smart?

This seems to me to show that the way ordinary speakers are cognitively related to the alleged projective content in the third case is different from the first two. This, again, makes it look like it might be just a different phenomenon. I hasten to add that I don’t think these are *very* strong reasons for doubting that SCF should be understood in terms of triggers and projected content; but they do they make me somewhat uneasy about that account.

## 7. Summary/Conclusion

On the other hand, and in conclusion, here are the points I *am* committed to. 1. All sentences containing supplementives in cases of catastrophic failure are infelicitous to some extent. 2. All supplementives exhibit felicitous underspecification. 3. The degree to which sentences containing supplementives exhibit infelicity in the case of catastrophic failure

varies among different kinds of supplementives, as does the ease with which they allow felicitous underspecification. 4. The differences mentioned in 3 are explained by differences in conversational purposes the different expressions serve and in roles the different expressions typically play. 5. Because of 2, the characterization of a context *c* being appropriate for an LF  $\phi$  must be given in terms of a match between the degree of resolution in *c* our metasemantics provides for the supplementives in  $\phi$  and the proper degree of resolution for those supplementives in *c* as determined by the conversational goals and aims in *c*. 1 and 2 show that all supplementives share significant properties that we would expect to be fixed at least in part by their metasemantics and so lend plausibility to the claim that they are governed by a single metasemantics.

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