8
Quantifier Phrases with Referential Meanings

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I am delighted to write a paper in honor of my old friend, Panu Raatikainen. We first met at a conference at the University of St. Andrews in July 2004. The conference was on "Truth and Realism", two things we are both enthusiastic about. We bonded immediately, particularly, I seem to remember, over a whisky tasting. We have been in frequent contact since, in Finland, in Hudson (my home town in upstate New York), in Dubrovnik, Buenos Aires, and many other places around the world. We agree on so much that it would be difficult for me to write a paper criticizing Panu's views. My paper proposes a view of quantifier phrases that I would expect Panu to approve of.

Introduction

Under the influence particularly of Keith Donnellan (1966, 1968), many hold the thesis that definite descriptions are "ambiguous", having not only the "attributive" quantificational meaning captured by Russell but also a "referential" meaning like that of a name or demonstrative. Under the influence particularly of Charles Chastain (1975),[1] some hold the same of indefinite descriptions. I called this thesis "RD" in "The Case for Referential Descriptions" (2004). The present paper will consider whether a similar case can be made that other quantifier phrases have referential meanings. I start by summarizing the case that descriptions have referential meanings.

[1] See also Strawson 1950, Wilson 1978.

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It is generally agreed that definite descriptions have a referential *use* as well as an attributive *use*. When 'the *F*' is used attributively in 'The *F* is *G*' the sentence conveys a thought about whatever is alone in being *F*; when 'an *F*' is used attributively in 'An *F* is *G*' the sentence conveys a thought about some *F* or other. So, the sentences convey "general" thoughts. When either description is used referentially, its sentence conveys a thought about a particular *F* that the speaker has in mind, about a certain *F*. So, the sentences convey "singular" thoughts.[2]

Despite the agreement that descriptions have these two *uses*, two *speaker* meanings, there is no agreement that they have two *linguistic* meanings. Many, most famously Saul Kripke (1979),[3] accept the quantificational attributive linguistic meaning described by Russell, but appeal to ideas prominent in the work of Paul Grice (1989) to resist the Donnellan-inspired idea that definite descriptions also have a referential linguistic meaning. They argue that the referential use of a definite in an utterance does not affect "what is said" by the utterance. For what is said is the meaning (content) of the Russellian general thought. The meaning of the singular thought is indeed conveyed but only by a "conversational implicature" or the like. So, what is thereby conveyed is not the meaning of the sentence on this occasion and hence not the concern of semantics; rather it is the *speaker* meaning and is the concern of pragmatics.

The Gricean response to referential uses made the embrace of RD seem too hasty because the response raised the possibility that all these uses could be explained pragmatically. This possibility is made very real by the indubitable fact that, with the help of Grice's "Cooperative Principle" - "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (1989: 26) – and related maxims, we seem to be able to give a pragmatic explanation of the referential use of *any* quantifier.

Here is Stephen Neale's illustration of the point:[4]

> Suppose it is common knowledge that Smith is the only person taking Jones' seminar. One evening, Jones throws a party and Smith is the only person who turns up. A despondent Jones, when asked the next morning whether his party was well attended, says,
>
> (7) Well, everyone taking my seminar turned up

[2] In calling such a thought "singular", I am not endorsing the view that the meaning contributed by a referential description in expressing the thought is simply its referent; in my view (2001), it contributes a mode of reference that is partly causal.

[3] For some others, see Neale 1990, King 1988, Ludlow and Neale 1991, and Bach 1994.

[4] Kripke's comparison of the case of the lover, involving the definite 'her husband', with the case of Smith raking the leaves, involving the name 'Jones' (Kripke 1979: 15–18) is much less persuasive: the two cases are crucially different (Devitt 1981b: 512–516).

> fully intending to inform me that only Smith attended. The possibility of such a scenario, would not lead us to complicate the semantics of 'every' with an ambiguity; i.e., it would not lead us to posit semantically distinct quantificational and referential interpretations of 'everyone taking my seminar'.
>
> We find a similar situation with plural quantifiers. Suppose that Scott Soames, David Lewis, and I are the only three people in Lewis's office. Soames has never played cricket and knows that I know this. In addition, Soames wants to know whether Lewis and I have ever played cricket, so I say
>
> (8) Most people in this room have played cricket
>
> fully intending to communicate to Soames that Lewis and I have both played cricket. There is surely no temptation to complicate the semantics of 'most' with an ambiguity,… (1990: 87–88)

Neale goes on to argue that Grice's pragmatic theory of conversational implicature (1989) explains the mechanism by which, in all these scenarios, the speaker conveys a meaning that his words do not literally have. Thus, the theory explains how Neale, by assuming that Jones is acting in accordance with "the Cooperative Principle" and its maxims, derives the implicature (speaker meaning), **Only Smith turned up**, from what Jones literally said (semantic meaning).[5]

In "Case" (2004), I claimed that the case for RD had been greatly underestimated. I argued that the referential uses of both definite and indefinite descriptions exemplify referential meanings: the uses are semantically referential, not merely pragmatically so. A key part of my argument for RD was the rejection of the above Gricean defense of Russell ("Argument I" in Sec. 2).[6] Stephen Neale (2004) aptly named this sort of rejection "the Argument from Convention". I presented the core of this argument for the referential 'the *F*' as follows:

> The basis for RD is not simply that we *can* use a definite referentially, it is that we *regularly* do so. When a person has a singular thought, a thought with a particular *F* object in mind, there is a regularity of her using 'the *F*' to express that thought. And there need be no special stage setting enabling

[5] There have also been some non-Gricean pragmatist views of referentially used definites (e.g., Recanati 1989; Bezuidenhout 1997, 2013; Powell 2010), reflecting the influence of the Relevance Theory of Sperber and Wilson (1995). For discussion, see Devitt 2021, ch. 9, particularly pp. 172–175, 178–181. It is often hard to see how these views differ, other than verbally, from the view that definite descriptions are ambiguous.

[6] Earlier presentations of such a rejection are Devitt 1997a: 125–128; 1997b: 388; Reimer 1998. A much less explicit version of the argument is to be found in Devitt 1981b: 316–318. I have often (1974, 1981a) preferred the term 'designational' to Donnellan's 'referential'.

> her to conversationally imply what she has not literally said, nor any sign that her audience needs to use a Gricean derivation to understand what she means. This regularity is strong evidence that there is a *convention* of using 'the *F*' to express a thought about a particular *F*, that this is a *standard* use. This convention is semantic, as semantic as the one for an attributive use. In each case, there is a convention of using 'the *F*' to express a thought with a certain sort of meaning/content.
>
> 'Every' and other quantifiers are different. There is no convention of using them to convey a thought about a particular object in mind. With special stage setting they certainly can be used for that purpose, as Neale illustrates. But then Grice shows us that with enough stage setting almost any expression can be used to convey almost any thought. (2004: 283)

The idea is that there is a convention for 'the *F*', and implicitly for the plural 'the *Fs*', but not for 'every *F*', that demands "saturation" by the particular object(s) in mind. So, the saturation is semantic. So, 'the' is ambiguous, having both a quantificational meaning that yields attributive descriptions and a referential meaning that yields referential descriptions.

What is it for the speaker to have a particular *F* object *x* in mind in using an expression? It is for the concept that she is thereby expressing to stand in a certain sort of causal relation to *x*, a relation involving the perceptual grounding of someone's thought in *x* and, perhaps, reference borrowings. Or so I have argued (1974, 1981a,b).

The Argument from Convention rests on the assumption that definite descriptions *are* regularly used referentially, *do* regularly have a referential speaker meaning. This is an empirical assumption about usage if ever there was one.[7] The assumption may not yet be supported by scientifically gathered data but it is by every dictionary I have consulted. Presumably lexicographers have arrived at their view by informal observation. This is in order because this regularity, like many others, is obvious to anyone who reflects on her linguistic experiences.[8] My observations lead me to think that most uses of definite descriptions are of "incomplete" ones, ones like 'the table' that fail to uniquely describe an object. And almost all nonanaphoric uses of incomplete ones are referential. All in all, setting aside superlatives and anaphoric uses, I'd guess that the vast majority of uses of definite descriptions are referential. Whether that guess would hold up to scientific testing, the regularity of referential uses surely would.

What is the best explanation of the regularity? The Argument from Convention offers a good explanation: definite descriptions have a referential meaning. I have

[7] Kasia Jaszczolt takes the referential reading of definites to be the default (2005: 106); Alessandro Capone also argues for this view (2019: 118–20).

[8] Given just how obvious it is, one wonders whether Russell's Theory of Descriptions would have been so dominant had it not been proposed by a philosophical giant.

argued (most recently, in 2021: ch. 9) that there is no good pragmatic explanation, let alone a better one. So, we should adopt RD.[9]

Can a similar case be made that other quantifier phrases have referential meanings? I turn to this question now, starting with a discussion of an interesting article by Mario Gómez-Torrente, "Quantifiers and Referential Use" (2015).

Gómez-Torrente

As Gómez-Torrente aptly remarks, Neale's examples of referential uses are "quirky" (2015: 102). They would not tempt anyone to suppose that they exemplify a semantic convention. But Gómez-Torrente argues that there are many *non*-quirky referential uses of quantifier phrases: "for all typical kinds of quantified determiner phrases … referential uses are frequent and can be perfectly standard, arising in run-of-the-mill contextual scenarios" (p. 98). He sums up:

> as far as frequency and standardness are concerned, the phenomenon of referential uses of quantifier phrases other than descriptions is not significantly different from the phenomenon of referential uses of definite descriptions, after all… (p. 110)

Now, if this were really so, I would of course argue that these uses exemplify referential meanings. For, as Gómez-Torrente well appreciates, the fact that referential uses of definite descriptions are frequent and standard is the basis for the claim that those uses are not to be explained pragmatically but semantically; that's the Argument from Convention. Gómez-Torrente, however, does not conclude that *any* of these uses of quantifier phrases are to be explained semantically. Nor does he conclude that they are to be explained pragmatically: "semantic theories of referential use … seem empirically feasible, but pragmatic theories seem empirically feasible as well" (p. 123). I think that none of Gómez-Torrente's examples of the uses of quantifier phrases is referential. Still, I think that there *are* some non-quirky examples.

Consider Gómez-Torrente's alleged examples of referential uses:

> Let's go back to Smith's murder case, but let's imagine that the police investigation developed somewhat differently. Now we are to imagine that Jones and her colleagues arrested seven people, Adams, Barnes, Crane, Daniels, Evans, Foster and Green, and charged all of them with Smith's murder; according to the police, they all acted together and played

[9] The Argument from Convention was a key inspiration for the approach to the semantics-pragmatics dispute that I take in *Overlooking Conventions* (2021; see also 2013a). The regular use of *any* expression with a certain speaker meaning provides good evidence that that meaning is conventional and so should be treated as semantic not pragmatic.

> comparable roles in the brutal slaying, and we can suppose that the police are right. Imagine further that Adams, Barnes, Crane, Daniels, Evans, Foster and Green are now standing trial in the dock, and that Jones is again present in the courtroom. Consider the following sentences:
>
> 5. (a) Every murderer of Smith is insane.
>   (b) Every guy in the dock is insane.
> 6. (a) Most murderers of Smith are insane.
>   (b) Most guys in the dock are insane
> 7. (a) Many murderers of Smith are insane.
>   (b) Many guys in the dock are insane.
> 8. (a) Several murderers of Smith are insane.
>   (b) Several guys in the dock are insane.
> 9. (a) Some murderers of Smith are insane.
>   (b) Some guys in the dock are insane.
> 10. (a) A few murderers of Smith are insane.
>   (b) A few guys in the dock are insane.
>
> It is of course easy to imagine utterances of (5)–(10) by which an utterer would not be attempting to communicate contents about any particular persons. But I think it's also easy (and I would say *easier*) to see how, if some of the detainees in the dock behave in suitable ways, Jones can use the quantifier phrases in all of these sentences of the form [Q_x: *x is a murderer of Smith*] *x is insane* intending to communicate, and successfully communicating, a variety of contents involving some particular detainees, meaning in each case that those particular detainees are or provide [Q_x: *x is a murderer of Smith*]; and hence it is mandatory to view the corresponding utterances as containing referential uses of the corresponding quantifier phrases.
>
> Imagine first that all the detainees are moving frantically in the dock. Jones may then make an utterance of either (5a) or (5b) intending to communicate, and successfully managing to communicate to an interlocutor sitting next to her in the courtroom, that *Adams, Barnes, Crane, Daniels, Evans, Foster* and *Green* are insane. Jones' utterance of (5a) thus contains a referential use of "every murderer of Smith" and her utterance of (5b) contains a referential use of "every guy in the dock". (pp. 102–103)

This is ingenious but quite unconvincing. The first thing to note is that generalizations about a domain that are not based on testimony should be, and typically are, *evidentially based* in thoughts about particular objects in the domain. Thus, a biologist expresses the belief that all echidnas have spikes based on observations of certain spikey echidnas; a diner expresses the belief that all of a town's Indian restaurants are cheap based (rashly) on experiences of a few cheap

ones; and Jones utters (5a) or (5b) based on observing Adam, Barnes, etc. in the dock. But it obviously does not *follow* that these speakers are intentionally expressing singular thoughts about the particular entities that formed the evidential basis for their generalizations.

Second, it is a familiar logical fact that a universal generalization entails all its instances. So, it follows from (5b) that any particular guy in the dock is insane. So, Jones' interlocutor, who presumably notices that Jones is looking at those particular guys, will quickly infer that Jones is likely to have a singular thought about each guy that he is insane. But it does not follow that Jones intentionally expressed that singular thought as well as the generalization. Indeed, why would she express that thought, given that it can be inferred from the generalization she does express? Lots of contents can be inferred from any utterance beyond the content of the thought intentionally expressed.

Third, if Jones wished to express a singular thought about each of those detainees, there is a conventional way of doing so: "Those/the detainees moving frantically in the dock are insane". Why would Jones not have said that if she simply wanted to convey the singular thoughts about those people? Of course, if (5a) and (5b) exemplify *another* conventional way of expressing such singular thoughts, then we would have an answer. But, as noted, Gómez-Torrente does not claim that (5a) and (5b) exemplify such a convention, and we have been given no reason to believe that they do.

Now consider what Gómez-Torrente has to say about 'most', 'many', and 'several':

> imagine that Adams, Barnes, Crane, Daniels and Evans are moving frantically in the dock, while Foster and Green are calmly seated. If Jones then makes an utterance of either (6a), (6b), (7a), (7b), (8a) or (8b) intending to communicate that *Adams, Barnes, Crane, Daniels* and *Evans* are insane, she will successfully manage to communicate precisely that to an interlocutor sitting next to her in the courtroom. Jones' utterances of (6a), (6b), (7a), (7b), (8a) or (8b) contain referential uses of "most murderers of Smith", "most guys in the dock", "many murderers of Smith", "many guys in the dock", "several murderers of Smith" and "several guys in the dock", respectively. (p. 103)

On what grounds? We have been told, in effect, that singular thoughts about Adams, Barnes, Crane, Daniels and Evans provide the evidential basis for Jones' utterances, but where is the evidence that these utterances are not simply quantificational? If Jones really intended to communicate singular thoughts about those five in particular why would she not do so in the conventional way by saying, "Those/the guys moving frantically in the dock are insane"? Given that she didn't, why should we suppose that by "most guys in the dock", for example, Jones means those particular guys rather than just any old guys in the dock that would constitute most of them? Given that Adams, Barnes, etc. are moving frantically, an interlocuter may indeed infer that singular thoughts about those guys form the evidential base

for Jones' utterances but, to repeat, we have no reason to believe that expressing the generalization expresses this evidential base.

Gómez-Torrente is no more persuasive about the referential use of 'some *F*s' and 'a few *F*s'. In sum, generalizations are frequently, although I would not say standardly, used in circumstances where it is apparent to the audience that certain singular thoughts form the evidential base for the generalization. But we have no reason to think that in such circumstances, speakers intentionally express those singular thoughts. Nonetheless, I think that a case can be made that 'many *F*s', 'several *F*s', 'some *F*s', and 'a few *F*s', but not 'every *F*' or 'most *F*s', do have conventional referential uses. A case can be made also for a quantifier phrase not discussed by Gómez-Torrente, the singular 'some *F*'.

A case that certain quantifier phrases have referential meanings

In "Case" (2004: 293-5), I distinguished the referential use of the indefinite 'an *F*' from that of the definite 'the *F*' and the demonstrative 'that *F*' as follows: in using 'the *F*' or 'that *F*' referentially, speaker *S* (intentionally) conveys to the audience *A* that *A* should identify the object *S* has in mind with an object that *A* has in mind *independently* of *S*'s utterance. Abbreviating, we can say that the conventional referential use of 'the *F*' and 'that *F*' is accompanied by a certain "identification expectation". *A*'s having the object in mind "independently" rules out *A*'s having it in mind *simply* as a result of "borrowing" the capacity to do so from *S* via the utterance. *A* must have some other link to the object. This independent link might have been established before the utterance or it might be immediately established by the object's perceptual salience in the context of the utterance; for example, 'the *F*' said while looking at, perhaps gesturing toward, a particular *F*. In the latter sort of case, the utterance prompts a link between *A* and the object that is additional to any that underlie *S*'s utterance; for example, in Donnellan's original story, a person looking at Jones says, "The guy in the dock is insane".

In contrast, *S*'s use of 'an *F*' referentially is *not* (usually) accompanied by the identification expectation: *S* does not (intentionally) convey that *A* should identify the object *S* has in mind with an object that *A* can identify independently. Here is an example from "Case":

> Several of us see a strange man in a red baseball cap lurking about the philosophy office. Later we discover that the *Encyclopedia* is missing. We suspect that man of stealing it. I go home and report our suspicions to my wife: "A man in a red baseball cap stole the *Encyclopedia*.". (2004: 286)

I use the indefinite because I suppose that my wife has no way independent of my remark to identify the suspect I have in mind. But suppose I knew that she had been among those who had observed the man in the red baseball cap lurking in the office.

Then I would very likely have said "The man in the red baseball cap...", or "That man in the red baseball cap ...".

My present thesis is that 'some F', 'some Fs', 'many Fs', 'several Fs', and 'a few Fs' are similar to 'an F' in having conventional referential uses without the identification expectation. The conventional referential uses of those quantifier phrases occur in circumstances where *S* does not (intentionally) convey that *A* should identify the particular object(s) that *S* has in mind with objects that *A* can identify independently.

I start with the argument for the referential 'some *F*' because that is an easy adaptation of the argument in "Case" for the referential 'an *F*': simply replace 'an *F*' with 'some F' in that argument. Thus, take the above *Encyclopedia* story as the example, but replace 'a man' with 'some man' in my report to my wife. So, the report becomes: "Some man in a red baseball cap stole the *Encyclopedia*." I wish to convey a singular thought about the particular person seen in the office not a general thought about just anyone in a red baseball cap, a thought that will be true only if that very man stole the *Encyclopedia*. I convey this thought, with no identification expectation, by using 'some man in a red baseball cap' referentially. That should be uncontroversial. Then, we offer the important Argument from Convention, Argument I (2004: 286–287). Such referential uses are not quirky: they are regular. When a person has a thought with a particular *F* object in mind, there is a regularity of her using, without any special Gricean stage setting, 'some *F*' to express that thought. This is strong evidence that there is a *convention* of using 'some *F*' to express a thought about a particular *F*, that this is a *standard* use. This convention is semantic.

Argument II (p. 288) is inspired by Kripke's idea of "Russell English". We stipulate a language, "Chastain English", in which there is a convention of using 'some *F*', as well as 'an *F*', to express singular thoughts without an identification expectation. The phenomena generated by speakers of this language would not differ from those generated by speakers of English; there would be the same regularities. So, these phenomena confirm that English simply is Chastain English.

Finally, we have Argument III, "Comparison with Deictic Demonstratives" (p. 289). A demonstrative, whether simple or complex, is a device that is regularly used to express singular thoughts about a particular object in mind. So too is the quantifier phrase, 'some *F*'. The devices differ in that demonstratives are (usually) accompanied by an identification expectation but 'some *F*' is not. But they are alike in depending for their reference on a certain sort of causal-perceptual relationship to that object. The referential role of 'some *F*' is as conventional as that of a demonstrative; these roles are semantic not pragmatic.

Turn next to the plural, 'some *F*s', and adapt the *Encyclopedia* story:

> Several of us see uniformed men lurking about the philosophy office. Later we discover that the *Encyclopedia* is missing. We suspect those men of stealing it. I go home and report our suspicions to my wife: "Some uniformed men stole the *Encyclopedia*.".

I do not wish to convey a general thought about uniformed men. Rather, I wish to convey, with no identification expectation, singular thoughts about *each* particular uniformed man that we saw in the office.[10] Each of these thoughts will be true only if the particular man in question stole the *Encyclopedia*. I convey these singular thoughts by using 'some uniformed men' referentially. Once again, we run the Argument from Convention. This use of 'some' seems to be a *conventional* way of conveying such singular thoughts in circumstances like this. Indeed, *how else* could I standardly convey such thoughts? Well, 'a few' would do as well: I could just as easily have said, "A few uniformed men stole the *Encyclopedia*." And, if there were enough uniformed men, it would have been appropriate to use 'many' or 'several'. Perhaps there are some other quantifier phrases that would do.[11] But, I emphasize, 'every' or 'most' would not do; nor would 'few'.[12] *Nor would the demonstrative, 'those', or the description 'the'* (because of their identification expectation). We could also again run an argument inspired by Kripke's stipulation of Russell English.

Suppose that we want to convey, in one simple sentence, with no identification expectation, singular thoughts about each of a group of objects. Then it seems that our *only* conventional ways of doing so are by using certain quantifier phrases.

So, I think that my example exemplifies a referential use of plural quantifier phrases. In the section on Gómez-Torrente above, I argued that his examples do not exemplify such uses. The circumstances of his examples differ crucially from those of mine. In his examples, should *S* (Jones) wish to express certain singular thoughts, she is in a position to convey to *A* that *A* should identify the *F* objects of those thoughts with objects that *A* has in mind independently of *S*; for, *S* surely knows that *A* is looking at the objects. In brief, *S* can convey an identification expectation. So, *S* is likely to use the plural demonstrative, 'those *F*s' or description, 'the *F*s', for *that is the conventional way* for a speaker to express such thoughts in such circumstances. In contrast, in the *Encyclopedia* example, *S* (me), wishing to express certain singular thoughts, knows that *A* (my wife) is not in a position to identify the objects of those thoughts with ones that *A* can identify independently of *S*; *A* has no acquaintance with the objects. In brief, *S* cannot rationally have an identification expectation. So, *S* cannot rationally express those thoughts using a plural demonstrative or description. Indeed, *there seems to be no conventional way to express those thoughts in these circumstances other than to use quantifiers such as 'some', 'many', 'several', and 'a few'*.

[10] Should we say rather that I wish to convey a singular thought about a *group* consisting of those particular uniformed men. This thought will also be true only if each of those very men stole the *Encyclopedia*. But it will be (literally) true only if *there also exists a group* consisting of those men. We should be very reluctant to explain the speaker meaning of such an ordinary use of a quantifier phrase in a way that commits its user to the existence of abstract entities. (This note was prompted by a question from Katarzyna Kijania-Placek.)

[11] Indeed, Antonio Capuano (2024) has recently argued persuasively that *numerical* quantifier phrases have referential meanings. So, if I had three people in mind as the thieves, I could convey my thoughts conventionally by saying, "Three uniformed men stole the *Encyclopedia*". (I was stimulated to write the present paper by blind reviewing Capuano's paper.)

[12] "Why not?", one wonders. I guess that they won't do because 'every', 'most', and 'few' indicate a *proportion* of a group. In contrast, 'some' and the others indicate a *quantity* of a group.

The circumstance of my knowing that my wife *cannot* make the independent identification is analogous to what I called, in discussing 'an *F*' in "Case" (2004: 293), circumstance "(a)". But we could come up with situations where *S* lacks the identification expectation because *S does not want A* to make the identification, perhaps even wants *A* not do so, even if *A* could. That is analogous to circumstance "(b)" in that discussion.

Just as there is a regular use of singular quantifier phrases ('an *F*', 'some *F*') to express *one* singular thought without an identification expectation, there are regular uses of certain plural quantifier phrases to express *more than one* singular thought without an identification expectation. What is the best explanation of this regularity? The Argument from Convention offers an answer: there are *semantic conventions* of using those quantifiers to express such singular thoughts.

For a variety of reasons, people who have singular thoughts about certain *F*s often want to express them in a simple sentence without conveying an intention that *A* identify the objects in mind with objects *A* has independently in mind; people want *A* to "open singular files" for those objects, not add to files independently opened. It would be surprising indeed if there were no conventional way for people to do this. Using the specified quantifier phrases is a brief conventional way to do it.

In sum, the Argument from Convention shows not only that 'the *F*', 'the *Fs*'. and 'an *F*' have a referential meaning but also that 'some *F*', 'some *F*s', 'many *F*s', 'several *F*s', and 'a few *F*s' do.

But doesn't this offend shockingly against Modified Occam's Razor, "Senses are not to be multiplied beyond necessity" (Grice 1989: 47)? The answer depends on how this popular maxim is construed. The maxim is usually understood as advising against the positing of a new conventional sense *wherever an utterance's message can be derived by a pragmatic inference*. Then the answer to our question would be, "Perhaps it does offend". But understood in this way, the maxim is quite false; or so I have argued (2013b: sec. 4; 2021: ch. 8). The maxim should be understood, on the model of the original Occam's Razor, as advising against positing a new sense *unless that sense is needed for the best explanation of the conveyance of the message*. Then the answer is, "No, it does not offend". For, as the Argument from Convention shows, the referential senses of the specified quantifier phrases are needed to best explain their referential uses.[13]

[13] A version of this paper was delivered at a conference, "Philosophy of Linguistics and Language", in Dubrovnik in September 2024. I am grateful for comments it received. And many thanks to Andrea Bianchi for his advice.

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