

Intentionalism out of control  
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ABSTRACT:

Suppose I say “That is my dog,” and manage to refer to my dog, Fido. Intentionalism claims that my intention to refer to Fido is part of the explanation of the way that the demonstrative gets Fido as its referent. Extreme intentionalism claims that my intention completely determines the referent. Moderate intentionalism claims that my intentions do not suffice: for instance, that the audience needs to be able to figure out that I intended to refer to Fido. But if these conditions are met, the speaker’s intention determines the referent; that the speaker is in control of this semantic fact. In this paper, we argue that intentionalism must give up the claim that the speaker is always in control: we will provide new examples where reference happens but the speaker either lacks the intention to refer, or does not know how to refer, or yet again does not have the requisite knowledge for intentionally referring; in all of these cases, we argue, the speaker is not in control of reference. We will argue that these cases provide better objections against intentionalism than the ones offered by proponents of conventionalism (such as Stojnic et al 2013; Stojnić 2021), and we go on to offer an improved formulation of intentionalism, which gives up claims of control, but retains the claims about the importance of the speaker's mental states in securing a referent for demonstratives.