Actually, *Actually*

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It is often thought that 'actually' has two meanings, or that it can play two kinds of semantic role. One role is that of a certain kind of indexical modal operator. The other role is that of a certain kind of rhetorical or discourse device. Thus Humberstone (2011):

> . . . the role of the word 'actually' is to achieve back-reference from non-actual possible worlds to the actual world. This is not the only role this word plays (consider 'Actually, it was the Smiths, not the Browns, who said they had to leave early') . . . (931)

Humberstone calls the indexical, modal back-referencing use of 'actually' the *logical* use. The distinction between this use and the rhetorical use is made already in Crossley and Humberstone (1977), who, in discussing 'actually', write:

> . . . by 'logical uses' we intend merely to exclude the speaker's merely rhetorical use of such phrases in dispelling or forestalling a misappre-hension on the part of the hearer, as when one says 'Actually it was March, not April, when we bought the house. . .' and so on. (11)

Humberstone (2011) remarks:

> It would be interesting, perhaps, to have some account of how the logical use of 'actually' is related to its rhetorical-cum-emphatic use, but the need for some such distinction has never been questioned. (1041)

In this note I question the need for such a distinction.[1] More specifically I will argue that the putative logical reading of 'actually', at least as it is standardly understood (namely, as a 2D indexical modal operator), does not exist. First, we do not need it to associate sentences containing 'actually' with appropriate truth conditions. Second, if this reading did exist, certain sentences would have readings that they do not in fact have. The problem with the thesis that there is such a reading of 'actually' is that, besides being unnecessary, it overgenerates.

The prevailing understanding of the logical use of 'actually' is the sort of account we see in various guises in Lewis (1970) (building on Prior 1968 and Kamp 1971), Crossley and Humberstone (1977), Kaplan

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1 Soames (2007) does, too. He suggests that the rhetorical use is a special case of the logical use. In contrast, I argue that there is no logical use.

(1977/1989) and Davies and Humberstone (1980). I will fix on Kaplan's particular formulation, given the influence of his semantic apparatus. It takes 'actually' to be an indexical in a 2D semantics. It is modelled by an operator $\mathcal{A}$ behaving semantically along the following lines:

$$c, w \models \mathcal{A}\Phi \text{ iff } c, w_c \models \Phi$$

Relative to a model (here suppressed), sentences take truth values relative to a context c and a possible world w.[2] Contexts are conceived of as world-bound: w_c is the world of c. The effect of $\mathcal{A}$ is to shift the world parameter back to the world of the context.

It is a familiar point that if we extend the language (and semantics) of quantified modal logic in such a way as to add this sort of operator, we can capture certain natural language readings that would otherwise be missed. Perhaps the best known sort of example is one emphasized by Crossley and Humberstone (1977). It appears in various logic textbooks.[3] Consider:

(1) It could have been that everyone actually rich was poor.

(Understanding the modal morphology counterfactually, rather than as admixing epistemic modality and temporality.) This seems to have a reading which says that there is a possible situation wherein all those rich in the actual world are poor in that possible situation. This reading cannot be captured within an ordinary textbook Kripke semantics for quantified modal logic. But we can capture it when that semantics is extended with $\mathcal{A}$, as follows:

$$\Diamond\forall x(\mathcal{A}Rx \supset Px)$$

Given standard assumptions – see Kaplan (1977/1989) for one detailed compositional semantics – the truth conditions will be exactly as desired. Roughly:[4]

$c, w \models \Diamond\forall x(\mathcal{A}Rx \supset Px)$ iff there is some world w' accessible from w such that everyone rich in w_c is poor in w'

Assuming in the usual way that ϕ is true at c iff $c, w_c \models \phi$ (i.e., ϕ is true at the diagonal point determined by c), this gets the right result.

Now it will be conceded by pretty much everyone (Humberstone included; see Humberstone, 2011, §7.18) that in ordinary language, 'actually' is not

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2   And a variable assignment, when we consider quantifiers.

3   For instance, Hughes and Cresswell (1996), Sider (2010).

4   For simplicity I take the quantifiers to range over a fixed domain of possible individuals (as in, e.g., Kaplan 1977/1989). Allowing for domains to vary with possible world and using 'actualist' quantifiers would require some minor adjustments to the truth conditions described here, but in ways that are orthogonal to the issues of target concern.

strictly necessary to achieve the reading in question.[5] The corresponding sentence *sans* 'actually' can mean precisely what (1) does:

(2) It could have been that everyone rich was poor.

Indeed, it is strikingly difficult to find any case where 'actually' is semantically indispensable. Nevertheless, the thought is that 'actually' can behave as a two-dimensional indexical modal operator of the sort just described, and that this logical use can serve to compel the target reading of (1).

This thought is mistaken. First, (1) seems no more restricted in respect of its available readings than (2); much more is required to establish that 'actually' is in fact exerting any influence at all on truth conditions of the whole. Second, if 'actually' behaved in the manner of $\mathcal{A}$, we would observe readings that we do not in fact see. Lewis (1986) already notes that 'actually' seems not always to behave as would be predicted by the standard 2D analysis. Let me focus the problem with some examples. Consider for instance what happens when we start with (1) but move 'actually' into the nuclear scope of the quantifier:

(3) It could have been that everyone rich was actually poor.

On the view under discussion, one reading of this sentence should be equivalent to:

$$\Diamond \forall x (Rx \supset \mathcal{A}Px)$$

The diagonal truth conditions of the sentence on this reading are predicted to be as follows:

$c, w_c \models \Diamond \forall x (Rx \supset \mathcal{A}Px)$ iff there is some world w' accessible from w_c such that everyone rich in w' is poor in w_c

Informally, this says that there is a possible situation where the rich people in that situation consist entirely of people who are, in the actual world, poor. This is a perfectly coherent truth condition. But if you consult your intuitions, you will notice that (3) cannot have this truth condition. (Warning: if you are a modal logician, ask someone else.) Intuitively, (3) does not differ from (2) in respect of what readings it allows. Here 'actually' evidently serves to highlight or flag a respect in which the possibilities under discussion differ – 'actually' is playing its 'rhetorical', modal contrastive role (whatever that is). But it is not semantically shifting the world relevant for the evaluation of expressions within its scope back to the actual world (or any other world, for that matter[6]).

5   This point is arguably implicit in some of the examples noted by Postal (1974) (as noted by Humberstone). It is also made by Wehmeier (2004).

6   For concreteness, I focus in this note on a simple two-dimensional indexical semantics wherein the semantic role of 'actually' is to shift the world parameter to the actual world.

For another example, consider:

(4) It ought to be that somebody inside is actually outside.

We would clearly go wrong if we allowed that this sentence has a reading formalizable as $\Box\exists x(Ix \wedge \mathcal{A}Ox)$, and having the following diagonal truth conditions:

$c, w_c \models \Box\exists x(Ix \wedge \mathcal{A}Ox)$ iff at all worlds w' relevantly deontically accessible from w_c, there is someone inside in w' who is outside in w_c

These are not the truth conditions of (4). Rather, these are the truth conditions of

(5) It ought to be that somebody (actually) outside is inside.

There is no reading of (4) on which it has the same truth conditions as (5). If what you want is for somebody outside to move inside, you should not utter (4). (4) does not differ, in respect of its possible readings, from the corresponding sentence without 'actually'.

The fundamental insight behind these examples goes back to Percus (2000). Percus discusses sentences like:

(6) Mary thinks my brother is Canadian.

He observes that while 'my brother' can be understood *de dicto* or *de re* relative to the attitude verb, there is no corresponding *de re* or 'transparent' reading of the embedded predicate 'is Canadian'. For instance, there is no reading of (6) wherein it is true if Mary takes as my brother some person who is as a matter of fact (but unbeknownst to Mary) Canadian. Very roughly, the generalization is that verbal predicates resist *de re* readings as compared to certain determiner phrases. What we have been observing is that 'actually' is powerless to render such readings available – *contra* what the received 2D semantics for this operator would lead us to expect.[7] Unsurprisingly, the sentence:

> But the problems I raise carry over straightforwardly to any account which renders 'actually' as a non-trivial world shifter of any sort. For example, another possibility is that the semantic role of 'actually' is, or can be, to shift the world parameter back to its value as it was before the application of the last modal operator it is embedded under. (Lewis 1986: 94 seems to favour this idea; so too Stalnaker 2014: 33.) On this analysis, 'actually' would take us back at most one modal step. This analysis would come apart in its predictions from the Kaplanian indexical analysis in cases where 'actually' occurs under two modal operators. But this difference confers no advantage with respect to the problems raised here.

7 Percus was considering the idea of postulating object-language world variables in the syntax of natural language, and his larger objective was to investigate the constraints on the distribution of such variables. He calls the generalization associated with the data just mentioned *Generalization X*. For analysis of the generalization, see Keshet (2008b), Schwarz (2012).

(7) Mary thinks my brother is actually Canadian.

does not differ from (6) in respect of what readings it allows.

A related generalization is identified by Keshet (2008a), who notes that determiner phrases appearing in existential *there*-constructions (weak determiner phrases) resist *de re* readings in a similar way. This fact, too, gives rise to trouble for the standard semantics for 'actually'. Compare:

(8) It could have been that someone (actually) in this house was outside.
(9) # It could have been that there was someone actually in this house outside.

If 'actually' had the power to shift the world relevant for material beneath it back to the world of evaluation for the whole sentence, (9) would have a reading equivalent to (8). It does not.

In response to these examples, it would be inadequate to reply that in sentences like (1), (4) and (9), 'actually' is merely taking its 'rhetorical-cum-emphatic' use. The problem is that the logical use is not even available. The view that there is such a use predicts that these readings should be available. Indeed, with sufficient manipulation of context, these alleged readings should leap out as available. For example, suppose everyone contextually salient is outside, nobody is inside, and that it would be best if somebody outside were inside instead. In such a situation, (5) is felicitous, but (4) is not. This only makes sense if (4) does not have a reading on which it is equivalent to (5). If (4) did have such a reading, we would presumably charitably gravitate towards it in such a context. Similarly, the putative logical use of 'actually' should be triggered by (9), since if available, it would rescue the sentence from markedness.

Could it be replied that 'The subjunctive/indicative contrast plays an essential role in determining when the 'actually' gets a rigidifying interpretation' (Stalnaker, 2014: 32) – more specifically, that the logical interpretation of 'actually' appears just when it occurs in an indicative environment? But (7) shows that this is not correct. Plausibly (4) is a problem for this view as well. It may be that mood is somehow relevant to whether an expression can receive a 'rigid' or transparent interpretation relative to a modal operator it is under. But if so, this would seem to be a fact having nothing particularly to do with 'actually'. (Mackay 2013 makes a similar point.)

Could it be replied that 'actually', as it appears in sentences like (1), (4) and (9), is taking a different scope than it superficially appears to be taking? A proponent of the view that there is a 2D indexical use of 'actually' must explain why 'actually' is in fact incapable of taking scope where it superficially appears to be taking scope in our examples. This requires argument. Clearly, other adverbs can take scope in the relevant positions. Other things being equal, there is a presumption in favour of interpreting expressions where they superficially appear. So there is burden for this view that remains

to be carried. Further, the carrying of said burden remains to be motivated first place, for we have yet to see examples whose analysis requires the postulation of a logical reading for 'actually'. Meanwhile, an apparently simpler response would dispense with the idea that 'actually' can function as a 2D indexical modal operator, and would maintain instead that there is really only one use for 'actually' – what Humberstone calls its 'rhetorical-cum-emphatic' use.

It of course remains to articulate a theory of this use. It has not been our aim to develop such a theory. But in light of the foregoing, we can at least say that it is not completely obvious that the semantic contribution of 'actually' is truth conditional in nature.[8] The word seems often to perform as a tool for contrasting possibilities in certain ways, but the relevant notion of contrast is not obvious.[9]

Nothing in the preceding is at odds with the idea that it can be very useful, in a variety of philosophical and logical contexts, to *introduce* an operator that behaves as the familiar 2D operator $\mathcal{A}$ does. The point has only been to highlight the ways in which $\mathcal{A}$ is a philosophical invention, and not actually 'actually'.

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8   In thinking about the meaning of this expression, it is perhaps useful to consider the behaviour of the adjective 'actual' in pairs like:

(10) Every gun on the table is fake.
(11) # Every actual gun on the table is fake.

Here we see 'actual' gets in the way of understanding (11) in the way we naturally understand (10) (that is, as saying roughly that everything on the table that seems to be a gun is not actually a gun).

9   It is, for example, dissimilar to the contrastive effect of the coordinator 'but', as the following pair illustrates:

(12) I expected Noam to come to the party, and he actually did come.
(13) ?? I expected Noam to come to the party, but he did come.

Sentences modified with 'actually' are not required to express propositions that are counter to expectations, or less likely than the relevant alternatives.

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Sexual Objectification

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Sexual objectification, in the broadest terms, involves (at least) treating people as things. Philosophers have offered different accounts of what, more precisely, this involves. According to the conjoint view of Catherine Mackinnon and Sally Haslanger, sexual objectification is necessarily morally objectionable. According to Martha Nussbaum, it is not: there can be benign instances of it, in the course of a healthy sexual relationship, for instance. This is taken to be a serious disagreement, both by Nussbaum and by recent commentators such as Lina Papadaki.