On 'In that'
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People have often spoken vaguely about stretching or limiting the meaning of a word. In English, we use the construction "in that" to do just this. "In that" clauses function as hedges, limiting the domain over which an assertion is held to be true and removing the speaker from responsibility for possible interpretations other than the one explicitly mentioned. Consider, for example, (1)-(3):

    (1) He's sick in that he's unable to cope with reality.
    (2) Jane's a good swimmer in that she wins every race.
    (3) She's a friend in that I've known her for years.

The "in that" clause in each of these sentences specifies how the speaker believes the initial assertion to be true. In this way the "in that" clauses function as hedges, limiting the applicability of the initial assertions. In each case the speaker has left open the possibility that the initial assertion is false with respect to factors which are often considered to be part of its domain. This the speaker of (2) has only asserted that as far as her ability to win races is concerned, Jane is a good swimmer. (2) is felicitous and true even if Jane is a poor swimmer by any other criteria. Notice that (1a), (2a) and (3a), below, are acceptable:

    (1a) He's sick in that he's unable to cope with reality,
         but otherwise he's just fine.
    (2a) Jane's a good swimmer in that she wins every race,
         but her style is terrible.
    (3a) She's a friend in that I've known her for years,
         but we're really not that close.

The unacceptability of (4) is further evidence that "in that" clauses are hedges which only assert the truth of a statement with respect to a specifically mentioned domain:

    (4) *Tunas are fish in that they swim so well.

The problem with (4) is that tunas are fish, period. Given what we know about tunas, we cannot call them fish with respect to their swimming ability and leave open the possibility that they are not fish in other ways. (1), (2) and (3) could be followed by a statement which basically contradicted the initial assertion. For example, one could say, "She's a friend in that I've known her for years, but otherwise we're like strangers". One could not construct a parallel sentence for (4) because the initial assertion is so obviously true no matter how we look at it.
We see then that the use of "in that" rests in part on the

ability of the initial assertion to be true in some ways and
false in others. A given assertion can be substantiated by a
number of facts. We saw from (4) that the "in that" clause must
limit the initial assertion by picking out some small subset of
these facts and that this could not be done if the initial asser-
tion was obviously true in all respects. Looking now at sen-
tences like (5), we see that there is a second restriction on the
use of "in that" clauses. In (5), we see that the initial asser-
tion, "He's sick", cannot be followed by an "in that" clause
which contains a fact that embodies the notion of sickness. In
other words, (5) is unacceptable because the "in that" clause
is automatically associated with the initial assertion:

      (5) *He's sick in that he has the measles.

(5) is starred because having the measles embodies the notion of
sickness to such an extent that the "in that" clause does not
limit the initial assertion. Looking back at (1) we see that
measles embodies the notion of sickness in a way that being un-
able to cope with reality does not. It seems that asserting that
X is sick has a core meaning - that X has a sickness. We intui-
tively feel that measles is always a sickness, whereas being un-
able to cope with reality is only at times considered to be sick
and is not a sickness per se. This distinction is borne out in
(6) and (7) as well:

      (6) He's sick with the measles.
      (7) * He's sick with an inability to cope with reality.

All names of illnesses interact within such "in that"   clauses
in this way. Thus all sentences in (8) are unacceptable in a
context-free environment:
      (8) *He's sick in that he has a cold.
        *She's sick in that she has the flu.
        *He's sick in that he has schizophrenia.

   Looking at (9), (10) and (11), we see that "in that" clauses
can limit the domain over which a statement is held to be true
while stretching the meaning of that statement. Compare (9)-(11):

      (9) *He killed Alice in that he murdered her.
      (10) He killed Alice in that he did nothing to keep her
          alive.
      (11) He killed Alice in that he was always jealous.

(9) is unacceptable, again, because "he murdered her" does not
limit the domain over which the initial assertion is being held
to be true. One cannot murder someone without killing them in
the process. In (10) and (11), the "in that" clauses are suc-
cessful hedges. They not only limit the domain over which "he
killed Alice" is believed to be true, but also stretch the mean-

ing of this initial assertion. If the speaker only said "he killed Alice", addressee would not normally interpret this to mean that he did nothing to keep her alive.

In (10) and (11), the "in that" clauses are adding something to the meaning of "kill". In these sentences, "he killed her" actually means something like "he indirectly caused her death". In addition to adding to the meaning of a word, "in that" clauses can be used to pick out connotated rather than literal meanings. For example, sentence (12):

    (12) Joe's a fish in that he swims so well.

Sentence (12) is obviously not asserting that Joe is, in real life, a fish. On the contrary, it is obvious that he is a human being. (4), which differs from (12) only in that tunas <u>are</u> fish, is unacceptable and involves no stretching. Sentence (12) ascribes to Joe a particular characteristic of fish - good swimming. The "in that" clause limits the domain over which the initial assertion is true to include only swimming ablility. It leaves open the possibility that Joe has no other fish-like qualities. Here we see that the "in that" clause is hedging on the initial assertion - the speaker of (12) could not be held responsible for insinuating that Joe smells like a fish, looks like a fish, or has a slimy personality.

"In that" clauses can pick out characteristics that are only metaphorically associated with the initial assertion. In (13), for example, the word "thief" does not mean a person who steals property, but has a more metaphorical meaning:

    (13) My butcher is a thief in that he charges $2.00/lb.
          for ground chuck.

Sentence (14), although similar to (13), is unacceptable except in a limited context:

    (14) *My butcher is a thief in that he's selfish and
          doesn't respect others' rights to property.

There are two differences between the "in that" clauses in (13) and (14). First notice that in (13) the "in that" clause mentions a thief-like action. This in turn brings to mind the connotative meaning of thief - one who gets things by unnatural, immoral means. In (14), however, the "in that" clause actually mentions <u>attributes</u> which are connotatively associated with thieves. In this way, (14) is on the other end of the spectrum from (15), which does not stretch the meaning of thief from its literal one, nor limit the domain over which "those men are thieves" is true:

    (15) *Those men are thieves in that they're robbers.

Sentence (14) differs from the acceptable (13) in a second way. Its "in that" clause does not contain an adequate justification for the initial assertion. One cannot call someone a thief because they have personality characteristics in common with thieves. "Thief" describes a performer of certain types of activities, not a type of person. To be called a thief, one must do something thief-like. Thus, we find the response in (16) to be odd, while the response in (17) seems perfectly alright:

(16) A: Bill is selfish and disrespectful of others'
rights to property.
B:*What a thief!
(17) A: My butcher sells hamburger for $2.00/lb.
B: What a thief!

Another example of an "in that" clause which stretches the meaning of a word is given in (18):

(18) All of us are students in that we're learning new
things all the time.

Strictly speaking, the initial assertion in (18) is false; it is actually implied that those addressed are not in fact students. The "in that" clause in (18), like that in (13), gives us evidence that the initial is true as a metaphorical description. Because the "in that" clause shows what "all of us" <u>do</u> which is similar to what students <u>do</u>, (18) is acceptable. The "in that" clause in (19), however, is unacceptable:

(19) *All of us are students in that we're unsure of our
futures.

Although most students are unsure of their futures (probably more than are learning new things all the time), this insecurity is not considered a central characteristic for the determination of whether or not someone is a student. Thus, there seems to be a continuum for studenthood which is roughly as shown in (20):

(20) in that + things synonymous to student or things which embody studenthood.	in that + things which students do, but which don't make one a student.	in that + things only tangentially associated w/ being a student.
unacceptable no stretching	acceptable	unacceptable too stretched

Sentence (21) fits into the left-hand category while (19) fits into the right-hand category:

(21)*He's a student in that he's a registered student at
U.C.

A continuum such as that in (20) could be made for any predicate. Each such continuum would vary in the amount of space between its poles. Words will have more or less flexibility for use with "in that" depending on how many characteristics there are which neither embody that word nor fall only tangentially within their domains. Thus a sentence like (22);

> (22) Dad is alive in that he holds a permanent place in our hearts.

is acceptable because it picks out a metaphorical meaning of alive which has validity in terms of our conception of what "alive" normally means even though it implies that dad is in fact dead. (23),
> (23) *Dad is alive in that his name (is) Max.
> 　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　(was)

is unacceptable because the "in that" clause does not give ample justification for the claim that dad is truly or metaphorically alive. Sentence (24):

> (24) * Dad is alive in that he's living.

is unacceptable because the "in that" clause does not limit the initial assertion, but rather is synonomous with it.

The right situation or context allows one to stretch the meanings of words even farther than they can be stretched in a context-free environment. Compare (25) with (26):

> (25) *He's sick in that he's standing there without speaking.
> (26) I really think Bob's sick in that he's standing there without speaking while John yells at him, and he never interrupts or tries to defend himself.

(25) is acceptable when found in the right context as provided by (26). This transition from unacceptablitity to acceptability is related to two conditions on the use of "in that". These are given in (27):

> (27) A. The speaker feels that X is a possible candidate for the domain over which the initial assertion may be true.
> 　　　B. The given "in that" clause limits the domain over which the initial assertion could be believed to be true.

Obviously these two are related.
　　Sentence (26) demonstrates that context allows condition B

to be met by extending the domain of the initial assertion, in this case, "he's sick". In (26), "sick" is stretched to include something like "not behaving in a manner that the speaker desires or approves of". The "in that" clause is picking this meaning out by specifically mentioning such a behavior. Notice, the stretched meaning of "sick" is related to the literal meaning of the word. One cannot extend a word so far that its stretched meaning is completely unrelated to its normal one. In fact, the usage of "sick" in (26) is similar to the use of "sick" in the expression of exasperation, "he's sick!", uttered after hearing that a person did something we do not approve of or would not do ourselves. The concept of abnormality which is associated with illness is thus carried over to behaviors which are alien or un-acceptable to the speaker.

We have seen, then, that "in that" clauses can enlarge the domain of a word, especially in a suitable context. Sentence (28) is similar to (5):

> (28) *She's tall in that she's 6'4".

Tallness seems to have too few dimensions to allow us to pick out height as a limiting one. (28) is acceptable, however, when placed in an appropriate context, as in (29):

> (29) A: I don't think she's tall.
>   B: She's tall in that she's 6'4" and that sure isn't
>   short.

The appearance of doubt that 6'4" implies tall is enough to allow "in that she's 6'4"" to occur as a hedge on "she's tall". The context in (29) invites speaker B to use "in that" in this way for two reasons. First, because argumentative discourse forces one to explicitly state the domain over which one believes what one says to be true; and second, because arguments create doubt as to whether or not the speaker's domain is the entire domain as seen from the addressee's point of view.

Now compare (30) and (31):

> (30) *There's a guy on our team who'll help us win tonight
>   because he's tall in that he can reach the basket.
> (31) A: He's not tall compared to the other players.
>   B: Yeah, but he's tall in that he can reach the
>   basket and that's all that counts!

Even though what is significant about the player's height in (30) is his ability to reach the basket, the "in that" clause is not limiting or hedging the initial assertion, "he's tall". In (31), however, there are two kinds of tall which are at issue - relative height and height as it relates to shooting baskets. Speaker B's comment is acceptable because the "in that" clause in (31) limits

the initial assertion to one type of tallness.

"In that" occurs also in sarcastic discourse:

 (32) She's a swimmer in that she swims a lot.
 (33) He's tall in that he thinks he is.

(32) is acceptable when read sarcastically because condition A (see (27), above) is violated; because swimming a lot does not make one a good swimmer. Using "in that she swims a lot" to justify the initial assertion, "she's a swimmer", implies that no better justification could be found, and therefore, that in the speaker's opinion, the statement is false.

 The sarcastic readings with "in that" are made clearer by the addition of "only" as in (34) and (35):

 (34) She's a swimmer only in that she swims a lot.
 (35) She's sick only in that she thinks she is.

With "only", sentences like (28) are acceptable. (36), providing a context which is the basis for the sarcasm, demonstrates this:

 (36) A: Gee, I didn't notice that Bill was particularly
     tall.
    B: Yeah right. He's only tall in that he's 6'7".
     I can see how you never noticed.

"Only" can also serve to expand the possible domain of the initial assertion - to make condition A apply. Thus, (37) and not (5) is acceptable:

 (37) Dr.: You have no cause to worry. He's sick only in
      that he has the measles. The other tests were
      negative.

 "In that", then, is a construction which works like a hedge to limit the domain over which an assertion is held to be true, removing the speaker from responsibility for interpretations other than those specifically mentioned. In the process of doing this, "in that" can stretch the meanings of words while limiting their applicability to a fixed and specified domain. In order to account for the occurance of "in that" clauses in English, a device is needed which can determine the domain over which a given predicate can apply, the degree to which various metaphorical or connotative meanings are central or tangential to the predicate's basic meaning, and the way these things change in context. That "in that" interacts as it does with context once again demonstrates that pragmatics and syntax are not necessarily separate, but that each influences the other to create acceptable speech.