A Semantics and Pragmatics for Transparent Free Relatives

Introduction. The choice of term used to describe an object or event often conveys an implicit point of view, the connotations of which presumptively default to Speaker commitment or acceptance (Grice 1978; Levinson 2000; Harris and Potts 2009, 2011, a.o.). Speakers may selectively maneuver this default by modifying the *means* by which a potentially controversial element is designated. Here, the pivot term *beergarita* (a literal and linguistic blend of *beer* and *margarita*) is enveloped in a so-called 'transparent free relative' (TFR; Wilder 1999; Grosu 2003). Intuitively, TFRs invite subtle pragmatic inferences about the speaker's commitment to the pivot as an appropriate description (Nakau 1971; Higgins 1981; Harris 2014).

(1) a. John made Mary a beergarita. vs. b. John made Mary *what he calls a beergarita*.

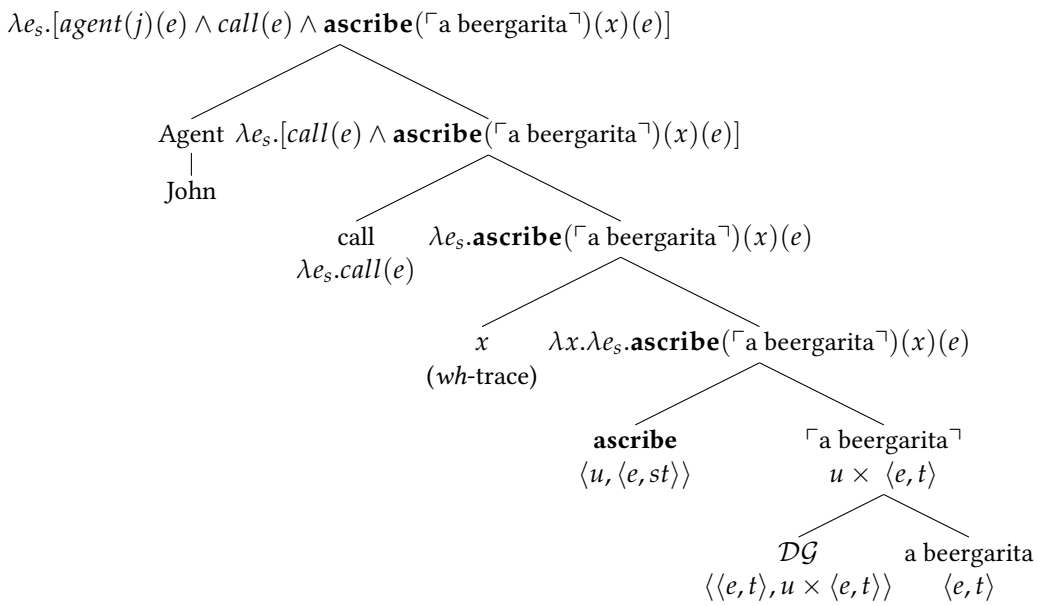
Two claims are defended here. The first is that the semantics of TFRs follow precisely the same compositional path as SFR structures (following Grosu 2003, 2016), except that different lexical items are involved in the computation (pace Wilder 1999; Schelfhout et al. 2004). An ascription relation that associates linguistic expressions with objects is introduced, along the lines of Potts (2007). TFRs are thus treated as an instance of open quotation (Recanati 2001) in which the quoted material must be interpreted with respect to it two roles in the sentence: (i) as a *linguistic expression*, and (ii) as a *semantically interpretable object*. The second claim is that TFRs subvert acceptance to a default *de lingua* commitment, but do not semantically resolve whether the speaker endorses or is otherwise committed to the use of the term.

Semantics of TFRs. Following Caponigro's (2003) analysis of SFRs, the composition of TFRs proceeds in three major steps. In STEP 1, the TP clause (*John called x a beergarita*) produces a predicate via lambda abstraction resulting from movement of *what*. Composition of the TP requires a semantics for the clause between the *wh*-trace and the pivot (*he calls x a beergarita*), which involves a select set of verbal predicates that take descriptions under an event of attribution (e.g., *call, consider, believe, describe as*). Although a complete analysis of these predicates constitutes a separate challenge, I model the central effects in terms of a *Description Generator* $\mathcal{DG}$ in (2), which assigns an element a description from the type of linguistic entities, akin to Potts' (2007) account of quotation (also Davidson 2015 and Henderson 2016).

(2) **Description Generator.** Let D_u be the domain of linguistic entities and $D_{\mathcal{L}}$ the domain of nonlinguistic entities. $\mathcal{DG}$ lifts the pivot ρ from an element of type $\sigma \in D_{\mathcal{L}}$ into a description $\ulcorner \cdot \urcorner$ of type $u \times \sigma$ for $u \in D_u$.

Following Potts' (2007) **utter** predicate, which relates linguistic and nonlinguistic objects, I propose a relation **ascribe** that returns objects falling under some mode of designation. In essence, *John called x a beergarita* ultimately involves an event in which John ascribes the description *a beergarita* to some entity x via a calling action. I assume that the verbs that participate in TFR constructions, like *call* and *describe as*, take small clause complements (Matushansky 2008).

(3) $[\![\textbf{ascribe}]\!](\ulcorner\rho\urcorner)(x)$ = the set of events in which $\ulcorner\rho\urcorner$ is an ascription of x.



In STEP 2, the *wh*-element takes the TP clause as an argument. Unlike SFRs, the only *wh*-word that appears with TFRs is *what*, which does not restrict its complement to inanimates, e.g., *She's {what / *who } he would call a gold digger*. Following Grosu (2003), TFRs utilize a semantically vacuous *what*, which fails to restrict the sortal domain: $[\![\text{what}_P]\!] = \lambda P.\lambda x.P(x)$. In STEP 3 for SFRs, the entire complex is type-lowered to via a definite/maximalization operator $\delta : \lambda P_{\langle e,t\rangle}.\imath x_e.P(x)$ to an individual of type e. TFRs instead employ a generalized free choice operator f_{GCF} (Kratzer 1998; Yanovich 2005) as a type repair strategy, picking out an instance of the class.

(4) **Schematic derivation of Transparent Free Relatives**

Step 1: $\lambda x.\lambda e_s.[agent(j)(e) \wedge call(e) \wedge \textbf{ascribe}(\ulcorner \text{a beergarita} \urcorner)(x)(e)]$

Step 2: (semantically vacuous)

Step 3: $f_{GCF}(\lambda x.\lambda e_s.[agent(j)(e) \wedge call(e) \wedge \textbf{ascribe}(\ulcorner \text{a beergarita} \urcorner)(x)(e)])$

Pragmatics of TFRs. By using an expresion α to describe some entity or situation x a speaker, implicitly commits herself to the appropriateness and accuracy of the expression. I term such uses *de lingua* commitments (Fiengo and May 2009). Although such commitments are generally backgrounded, TFRs bring such commitments to the fore. Whether the Speaker accepts the term *beergarita* depends on the extent to which John is deemed an authoritative source. Authoritative sources can *introduce* the term to an ignorant audience, rather than to reject it; for example, *what we mixologists call a beergarita* identifies the Speaker as an authority. Listeners must use additional factors such as modality, intonational marking, and non-verbal indicators in establishing non-Speaker commitment (Harris and Potts 2011).

Conclusion and prospects. Not only are TFRs extremely common in written and spoken language, but they also reveal an instance in which natural language expressions are seamlessly merged into linguistic structure. A virtue of the present analysis is that it provides an account which is parallel in form to other types of FRs, but derives a unique meaning by independently motivated semantic elements and standard modes composition. Furthermore, the analysis presented here clears the way to understanding the subtle pragmatics of TFRs.

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