

Specifying why a doctor isn't Mary

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1 The puzzle: the indefinite restriction

- Simple indefinite DPs tend to make poor subjects of specificational copular clauses (SCCs).
- (1) a. *A doctor is Mary.
 b. *A building is Robarts Library.
 c. *A linguist is Eric Lenneberg
- More complex indefinites are better SCC subjects.
- (2) a. A newly-minted doctor is Mary.
 b. A building on campus no-one likes is Robarts Library.
 c. An underrated figure in the history of generative grammar is Eric Lenneberg.

Question: What is the nature of the indefinite restriction? How is it best characterized?

My Answer: An SCC subject must contain, but not be, a contrastive topic marked constituent.

1.1 Outline

- Mikkelsen's (2004) pragmatic analysis of SCC subjects.
- Theory background (Büring 2003)
- Arguments for my solution
- Ruling in (2) and ruling out (1)
- Conclusion

2 Mikkelsen's (2004) Analysis

- Mikkelsen argues for a discourse-pragmatic analysis of the indefinite restriction.
 - This is in contrast to a semantic analysis argued for *e.g.* by Heycock (2012). (See Appendix A)
 - She observes that SCCs have a rigid information structure: DP2 must be focus/DP1 cannot be focus.
- (3) a. Who is the winner?
 (i) The winner is John. (Specificational)
 (ii) John is the winner. (Predicational)

*Thanks to Michela Ippolito, Guillaume Thomas, Susana Béjar and members of the UofT Sem/Prag group and Syntax Project for helpful comments.

- b. What is John?
 (i) #The winner is John. (Specificational)
 (ii) John is the winner. (Predicational)

- It follows that DP1 must be topical. (*i.e.*, discourse given)
- Indefinites introduce new discourse referents. (Heim's (1982) Novelty Condition)
- The indefinite restriction, then, is due to a clash between the topichood requirement on SCC subjects and the Novelty Condition on indefinites.
- Those indefinites that are licit SCC subjects are relatively given compared to DP2.

However:

- Simple indefinites (*a(n) N*) cannot be SCC subjects regardless of how given/topical they are.
- (4) Bill is a doctor. #A doctor is John (too) (Mikkelsen 2004, p236)
- Mikkelsen leaves this puzzle open, suggesting the unacceptability of (4) may be related to the general infelicity of two adjacent instances of a DP as in (5).
- (5) Sally is a doctor. #A doctor came to dinner last night. (Mikkelsen 2004, p236)
- The second sentence in (5) is acceptable if *a doctor* is not uttered in the previous sentence.
 - The SCC in (4) cannot be made acceptable.
- (6) I know some doctors.
- a. A doctor came to dinner last night.
 b. #A doctor is John.
- If we require that *part* of the SCC subject be marked as *contrastive* topic, we can capture the data.

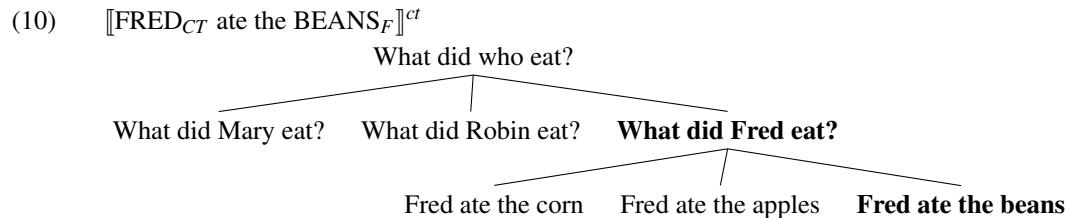
3 Theoretical Background: Contrastive Topics

- The notion of Contrastive Topic (CT) comes from Büring's (2003) analysis of Jackendoff's (1972) A- and B-Accents
- (7) (Well, what about FRED? What did HE eat?)
 FRED_B ate the BEANS_A.
- (8) (Well, what about the BEANS? Who ate THEM?)
 FRED_A ate the BEANS_B.
- The A-Accent, which corresponds to the Wh-element in each example marks Focus.
 - Büring (2003) refers to the B-accented element as the CT (cf. Roberts's (2012) *dependant focus*)
 - The function of CT, like that of Focus, is to generate alternatives.
 - Focus alternatives are representable as sets of propositions (Rooth 1992) equivalent to the interpretations of questions (Groenendijk and Stokhof 1996)
 - CT alternatives are representable as sets of sets of propositions.

$$(9) \quad a. \quad \llbracket \text{FRED}_B \text{ ate the BEANS}_A \rrbracket^f = \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{Fred ate the corn} \\ \text{Fred ate the beans} \\ \text{Fred ate the apples} \\ \dots \end{array} \right\} = \llbracket \text{What did Fred eat?} \rrbracket$$

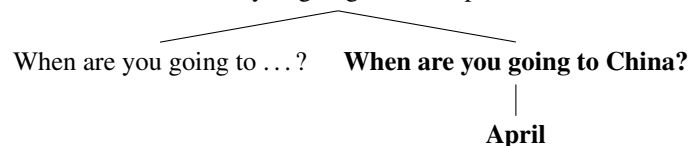
$$b. \llbracket \text{FRED}_B \text{ ate the BEANS}_A \rrbracket^{ct} = \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{What did Fred eat?} \\ \text{What did Mary eat?} \\ \text{What did Robin eat?} \\ \dots \end{array} \right\} = \llbracket \text{What did who eat?} \rrbracket$$

- Buring represents these interpretations as d(iscourse)-trees

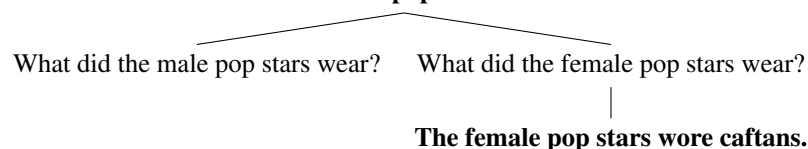


- Generally, CT-Foc structures identify a question and superquestion that they answer.
- CT-Foc structures have multiple discourse functions that the d-trees can represent.

- (11) a. A: When are you going to China? (Roberts 2012)
 B: I'm going to [China]_{CT} in [April]_F.
 b. When are you going to which place?



- (12) a. A: What did the pop stars wear? (Buring 2003)
 B: The [female]_{CT} pop stars wore [caftans]_F.
 b. What did the pop stars wear?



4 Contrastive is the right kind of topic for SCC subjects

- SCC subjects are topics, but neither givenness nor aboutness are sufficient

Hypothesis 1: SCC subjects must be givenness topics

- If SCC subjects must be relatively given, then fully given subjects ought to be preferred.
- Fully given subjects are infelicitous, partially given subjects are acceptable

- (13) Many philosophers have written about the mind-body problem.
 a. #A philosopher who has written about the mind-body problem is Chomsky.
 b. A modern philosopher who has written about the mind-body problem is Chomsky.

- (Relative) givenness isn't the factor that allows a DP to be an SCC subject.

Hypothesis 2: SCCs must be about their subjects.

- A sentence's topic, is what the sentence is about.

(14) **Test for aboutness (Reinhart 1981):**

If *John saw Bill* is about **John**, then

Mary said John saw Bill = *Mary said about John that he saw Bill*

- It is permissible for an SCC to be about only part of its subject.

Assumption: SCC subjects are only interpreted *de dicto*.

(15) **(Context: David Bowie is my favourite singer. is True)**

My favourite singer is Ziggy Stardust

- Mary said my favourite singer is Ziggy Stardust (*de re/de dicto*)
- Mary said about singers that my favourite is Ziggy Stardust (**de re/de dicto*)

- There seems to be no requirement that SCCs be about their subject DPs.

My Proposal

- The licit SCC subjects in (2) are most naturally pronounced with intonational stress on some component.

- (16)
- A NEWLY-minted doctor is Mary.
 - A newly-MINTED doctor is Mary.
 - A newly-minted DOCTOR is Mary.
 - #A newly-minted doctor is Mary.

- Each of the intonation patterns in (16-a–c) can be used in a distinct set of discourse contexts.
- The discourse contexts of SCCs are identical to canonical CT-Foc structures.

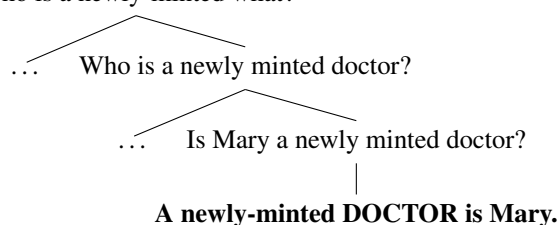
(17) Who is a veteran doctor?

- A NEWLY-minted doctor is Mary.
- #A newly-minted DOCTOR is Mary.

- The intonation pattern in (17-b) is infelicitous because it incorrectly marks *doctor* as novel and *newly-minted* as given.

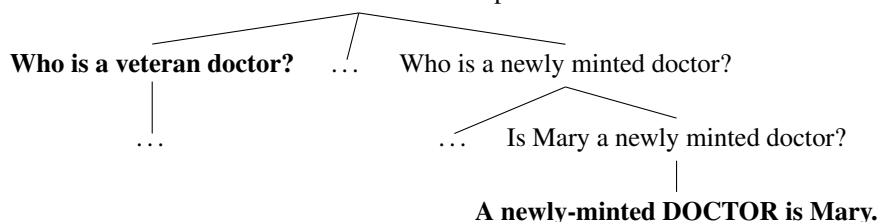
(18) #A newly-minted DOCTOR is Mary.

Who is a newly-minted what?



(19) A NEWLY-minted doctor is Mary.

Who is a doctor of what level of experience?



(20) **CT condition on SCC subjects (part one):**

Some constituent of the subject of an SCC must be CT-marked.

- Ruling out simple indefinite SCCs can be done with a simple extension of (20).

(21) **CT condition on SCC subjects (part two):**

The entire SCC subject must not be CT-marked

- Consider the CT-Foc structure of (22)

(22) *A doctor is Mary.

- DP2 is focused. (Mikkelsen 2004)
- Some constituent of DP1 is CT-marked.
- te indefinite article is not CT marked.
- *doctor* must be CT-marked.
- Assuming the indefinite article is semantically vacuous, $a [doctor]_{CT}$ is equivalent to $[a doctor]_{CT}$.
- So, (22) requires that the entire SCC subject be CT-marked, violating the proposed CT condition on SCCs.

4.1 Apparent counter-examples

4.1.1 Stressed $a(n)$

- A version of (22) with a stressed indefinite article ([ej] in my dialect) is more acceptable than (22) as is.

(23) ? A_{CT} doctor is Mary.

- The stressed indefinite article generally marks a contrast with the definite article.

(24) A: You must be the professor.

B: I'm A_F professor.

- This is predicted by the proposed CT condition on SCC subjects.

(25) **CT condition on SCC subjects:**

- (i) Some constituent of the subject of an SCC must be CT-marked.
- (ii) The entire SCC subject must not be CT-marked.

- $a_{CT} doctor \neq [a doctor]_{CT}$
- a constituent of the SCC subject rather than the entire subject is CT-marked.

4.1.2 *One* and *another*

- “Simple” indefinite DPs headed by *one* or *another* can be SCC subjects.

(26) a. One doctor is Mary.

b. Another doctor is Molly.

- The term “simple indefinite” for these examples is a misnomer.
- *One* and *another* are complex determiners.
- Kayne (2015) argues that *one* is composed of the indefinite determiner and a “singular classifier.”

– $one = w\text{-}+an$

- Heim, Lasnik, and May (1991) provides an analysis of *another* as $an\text{-}+other$

- In both cases the determiner-like element bears a contentful element that can be CT-marked

(27) a. $w\text{-}CT\text{-}an$ doctor is Mary.

b. $an\text{-}other_{CT}$ doctor is Molly.

4.2 Questions/Implications

- Though it seems to make the right generalization, the CT condition is a rather odd constraint.
 - It is reasonable to associate a particular construction or transformation with a particular information structure.
 - The requirement that part but not all (and often not the head) of the subject be CT-marked is difficult to formulate syntactically.
- Like any generalization, it should be derivable from general properties of the computational system. I leave that to further research.

5 Conclusion

- The indefinite restriction is pragmatic in nature.
- Following Mikkelsen's (2004) observation, I analysed the SCC subject as topical (in some sense).
- SCC subjects must contain but not be CT-Marked constituents.
- This generalization predicts which indefinite DPs are acceptable SCC subjects in what discourse contexts, and rules out simple indefinite SCC subjects.

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A Heycock (2012)

- Heycock argues that the indefinite restriction is a ban on weak-quantified DPs as SCC subjects.
- The argument is based on two parallels

A.1 Parallel 1

- English SCC subjects cannot be focused (see (3), above), and neither can German scrambled objects. (Lenerz 1977)

- (28) a. Wem hat Peter das Futter gegeben?
who.DAT has Peter the.ACC food given
“Who has Peter given the food?”
(i) Peter hat der Katze das Futter gegeben.
Peter has the.DAT cat the.ACC food given
“Peter has given the cat the food” [Default order]
(ii) Peter hat das Futter der Katze gegeben.
Peter has the.ACC food the.DAT cat given
“Peter has given the food to the cat” [Scrambled order]
- b. Was hat Peter der Katze gegeben?
what.ACC has Peter the.DAT cat given
“What has Peter given (to) the cat?”
(i) Peter hat der Katze das Futter gegeben.
Peter has the.DAT cat the.ACC food given
“Peter has given the cat the food” [Default order]
(ii) #Peter hat das Futter der Katze gegeben.
Peter has the.ACC food the.DAT cat given
“Peter has given the food to the cat” [Scrambled order]

- According to Hoop (1992) and Diesing (1992) scrambled objects are obligatorily interpreted strong.

A.2 Parallel 2

- Milsark (1974) argues that only strong-quantified DPs can serve as subjects of Individual-Level predicate

- (29) I had been struggling with a complicated set of data ...
a. ?*A problem was particularly hard.
b. One problem was particularly hard.
c. {?A/one} problem that I came across was particularly hard.
d. One of the problems was particularly hard. (Heycock 2012)

- Heycock argues that the same pattern holds for indefinite SCC subjects as shown in (30).

- (30) a. ?*A problem was that we didn’t understand all the parameters.
b. One problem was that we didn’t understand all the parameters.
c. {A/one} problem that I came across was that we didn’t understand all the parameters.
d. One of the problems was that we didn’t understand all the parameters. (Heycock 2012)

A.3 Issues

- Heycock’s proposal that the indefinite restriction is a restriction on weak-quantified SCC subjects fails to capture the data
- Some weak-quantified DPs can be SCC subjects (31) and some strong-quantified DPs cannot (32).

- (31) a. (i) There is **a building no-one likes** on St George Street.
(ii) **a building no-one likes** is Robarts.
b. (i) There are **sm side-effects**.
(ii) **Sm side-effects** are headaches and dizziness.
- (32) a. Each doctor is Mary, Bill, Sue, and John. (*Specificational)
b. ?Most early generative grammarians are Chomsky and Halle. (*Specificational)
c. ?SOME side-effects are drowsiness and blurred vision. (*Specificational)