

Specifying why a doctor isn't Mary

Dan Milway
University of Toronto

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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

- Previous accounts of the indefinite restriction (Heycock 2012; Mikkelsen 2004)
- Theory background (Büring 2003)
- Arguments for my solution
- Ruling in (2) and ruling out (1)
- Conclusion

2 Previous Accounts

2.1 Mikkelsen (2004)

- Mikkelsen 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)
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)

Dan Milway
dan.milway@mail.utoronto.ca

BLS 42
7 Feb 2016

- 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 on (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.

2.2 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

2.2.1 Parallel 1

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

- (7) 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 [Default order]
"Peter has given the cat the food"
(ii) Peter hat das Futter der Katze gegeben.
Peter has the.ACC food the.DAT cat given [Scrambled order]
"Peter has given the food to the cat"
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 [Default order]
"Peter has given the cat the food"
(ii) #Peter hat das Futter der Katze gegeben.
Peter has the.ACC food the.DAT cat given [Scrambled order]
"Peter has given the food to the cat"
- According to Hoop (1992) and Diesing (1992) scrambled objects are obligatorily interpreted strong.

2.2.2 Parallel 2

- Milsark (1974) argues that only strong-quantified DPs can serve as subjects of Individual-Level predicate
- (8) I had been struggling with a complicated set of data ...
- ?*A problem was particularly hard.
 - One problem was particularly hard.
 - {?A/one} problem that I came across was particularly hard.
 - One of the problems was particularly hard.
- (Heycock 2012)
- Heycock argues that the same pattern holds for indefinite SC subjects as shown in (9).
- (9) 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)

2.2.3 Issue

- 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 and some strong-quantified DPs cannot
- (10) 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.
- (11) a. Each doctor is Mary, Bill, Sue, and John. (*Specification)
b. ?Most early generative grammarians are Chomsky and Halle. (*Specification)
c. ?SOME side-effects are drowsiness and blurred vision. (*Specification)

2.3 Summary

- Mikkelsen (2004) proposes to analyse the indefinite restriction in discourse-pragmatic terms
 - SCC subjects must be topics
 - Indefinites do not make good topics
- Heycock (2012) suggests a semantic analysis
 - SCC subjects cannot be weak-quantified
- Neither analysis fully captures the data.
- In the remainder of the talk, I will modify Mikkelsen's analysis to capture the indefinite restriction

3 Theoretical Background: Contrastive Topics

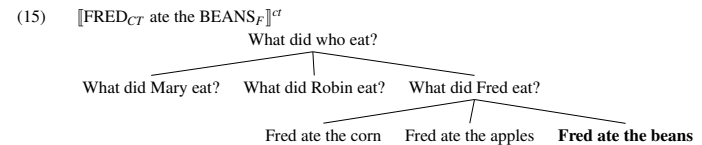
- The notion of Contrastive Topic (CT) comes from Büring's (2003) analysis of Jackendoff's (1972) A- and B-Accents
- (12) (Well, what about FRED? What did HE eat?)
FRED_B ate the BEANS_A.
- (13) (Well, what about the BEANS? Who ate THEM?)
FRED_A ate the BEANS_B.

- 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.

$$(14) \quad a. \quad \llbracket \text{FRED}_B \text{ ate the BEANS}_A \rrbracket^f = \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{Fred ate the corn} \\ \text{Fred ate the beans} \\ \text{Fred ate the apples} \\ \dots \end{array} \right\} = \llbracket \text{What did Fred eat?} \rrbracket$$

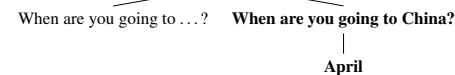
$$b. \quad \llbracket \text{FRED}_B \text{ ate the BEANS}_A \rrbracket^{ct} = \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{What did Fred eat?} \\ \text{What did Mary eat?} \\ \text{What did Robin eat?} \\ \dots \end{array} \right\} = \llbracket \text{What did who eat?} \rrbracket$$

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

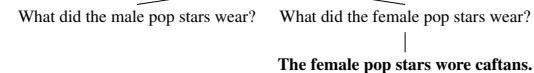


- Generally, CT-F structures identify a question and superquestion that they answer.
- CT-F structures have multiple discourse functions that the d-trees can represent.

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



- (17) a. A: What did the pop stars wear?
B: The [female]_{CT} popstars wore [caftans]_F. (Büring 2003)
- 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
- Fully given subjects are infelicitous, partially given subjects are acceptable

- (18) Many philosophers have written about the mind-body problem.
- #A philosopher who has written about the mind-body problem is Chomsky.
 - A modern philosopher who has written about the mind-body problem is Chomsky.
- The SCCs do not have to be completely *about* their subject DP.

Test for aboutness (Reinhart 1981): For sentence S containing constituent X, if S is about X, then *Mary said S* is paraphrasable as *Mary said about X, S'* where S' is equal to S with X replaced by its pro-form.

- (19) *Mary said John saw Bill = Mary said about John that he saw Bill* iff *John saw Bill* is about John.

Assumption: SCC subjects are only interpreted *de dicto*

- (20) **Context:** David Bowie is my favourite singer.
- Mary said my favourite singer is Iggy Pop (*de re/de dicto*)
 - Mary said about singers that my favourite is Iggy Pop (**de re/de dicto*)
- The licit SCC subjects in (2) are most naturally pronounced with intonational stress on some component
- (21)
- 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 (21-a-c) can be used in a distinct set of discourse contexts
 - The discourse contexts of SCCs are identical to canonical CT-Foc structures

- (22) Monica's been a doctor for a decade.
- A NEWLY-minted doctor is Mary.
 - #A newly-minted DOCTOR is Mary.
- The intonation pattern in (22-b) is infelicitous because it incorrectly marks *doctor* as novel and *newly-minted* as given

- (23) A newly-minted DOCTOR is Mary.
Who is a newly-minted what?
- ```

graph TD
 A[Who is a newly minted doctor?] --> B[... Who is a newly minted doctor?]
 A --> C[... Is Mary a newly minted doctor?]
 C --> D[A newly-minted DOCTOR is Mary.]

```

- (24) **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 (24).

- (25) **CT condition on SCC subjects (part two):**  
The entire SCC subject must not be CT-Marked

- Consider the CT-Foc structure of (26)

- (26) \*A doctor is Mary.
- DP2 is Foc-marked (Mikkelsen 2004)

- Some constituent of DP1 is CT-marked.
- the indefinite article is not CT marked.
- doctor* must be CT-marked.
- Assuming the indefinite article is semantically vacuous, *a [doctor]<sub>CT</sub>* is equivalent to *[a doctor]<sub>CT</sub>*
- So, (26) 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 (26) with a stressed indefinite article (*i.e.* [ej]) is more acceptable than (26) as is.

- (27) ?*A<sub>CT</sub> doctor* is Mary

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

- (28) A: You must be the professor  
B: I'm *A<sub>F</sub>* professor

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

- (29) **CT condition on SCC subjects:**
- Some constituent of the subject of an SCC must be CT-Marked.
  - The entire SCC subject must not be CT-Marked.

- a<sub>CT</sub> doctor* ≠ *[a doctor]<sub>CT</sub>*
- 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.

- (30)
- One doctor is Mary.
  - 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+an*
- Heim, Lasnik, and May (1991) provides an analysis of *another* as *an+other*
- In both cases the determiner-like element bears a contentful element that can be CT-marked

- (31)
- w-<sub>CT</sub>-an* doctor is Mary.
  - an-<sub>CT</sub>-other* doctor is Molly

## 5 A general constraint on CT-Foc structures

- Though it seems to make the right generalization, the CT condition is a rather odd constraint.
  - It can be derived from a general constraint on CT-Foc structures.
- (32) **The general constraint on CT-Foc structures:**  
A CT-Foc structured utterance must contain both novel/contrastive material and given/presupposed material.

- Consider the prototypical CT-Foc structure.

- (33) (What about FRED? What did HE eat?)  
FRED<sub>CT</sub> ate [the BEANS]<sub>F</sub>.
- a. **Focus:** the beans  
**CT:** Fred  
**Given/presupposed:** x ate y
- b.
- ```

      Who ate what?
     /      |      \
  What did Fred eat? ...
   /      |      \
Did Fred eat the beans? ...
 |
Yes
  
```

- Compare this to an ill-formed SCC

- (34) *A doctor is Mary
- a. **Focus:** Mary
CT: A doctor
given/presupposed: ∅
- b.
- ```

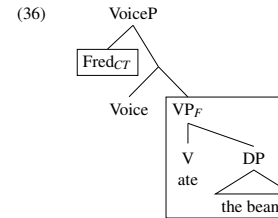
 ??
 / \
 Who is a doctor? ...
 / | \
Is Mary a doctor? ...
 |
Yes

```

- Even in cases where the entire *pronounced* utterance is CT- or Foc-marked there is some *unpronounced* given material

- (35) (What about FRED? what did HE do?)  
FRED<sub>CT</sub> [ate the beans]<sub>F</sub>.
- a. **Focus:** ate the beans  
**CT:** Fred  
**Given/presupposed:**  $\exists x \exists e [\text{Agent}(x, e)]$
- b.
- ```

      Who did what?
     /      |      \
  What did Fred do? ...
   /      |      \
Did Fred eat the beans? ...
 |
Yes
  
```



6 Conclusion

- The indefinite restriction is pragmatic in nature
- SCC subjects must contain but not be CT-Marked constituents
- This is a construction-specific corollary of a general requirement that CT-Foc structured utterances contain both novel and given material

6.1 Questions

- Given that the indefinite restriction is a constraint on syntactic structures, how can the CT condition instantiated in the syntax?
- Why should the general constraint on CT-Foc structures exist?
- What implications does this have for theories of CT and Foc (e.g., alternative semantics)?

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