

# 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 doctor is Mary.
  - \*A building is Robarts Library.
  - \*A linguist is Eric Lenneberg
- More complex indefinites are better SCC subjects.
- (2)
- A newly-minted doctor is Mary.
  - A building on campus no-one likes is Robarts Library.
  - 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)
- Who is the winner?
    - The winner is John. (Specificational)
    - John is the winner. (Predicational)
  - What is John?
    - #The winner is John. (Specificational)
    - 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 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  
"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.

### 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. ?\*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 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 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 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

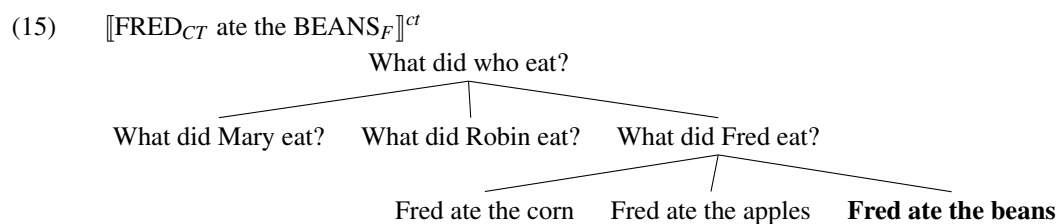
## 3 Theoretical Background: Contrastive Topics

- 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<sub>B</sub> ate the BEANS<sub>A</sub>.
- (13) (Well, what about the BEANS? Who ate THEM?)  
FRED<sub>A</sub> ate the BEANS<sub>B</sub>.

- 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.

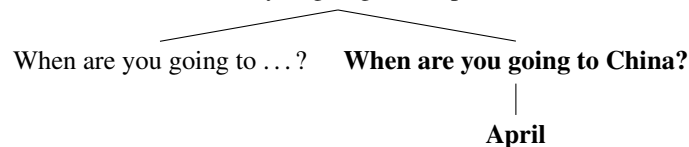
$$(14) \quad \begin{aligned} \text{a. } \llbracket \text{FRED}_B \text{ ate the BEANS}_A \rrbracket^f &= \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{Fred ate the corn} \\ \text{Fred ate the beans} \\ \text{Fred ate the apples} \\ \dots \end{array} \right\} = \llbracket \text{What did Fred eat?} \rrbracket \\ \text{b.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

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

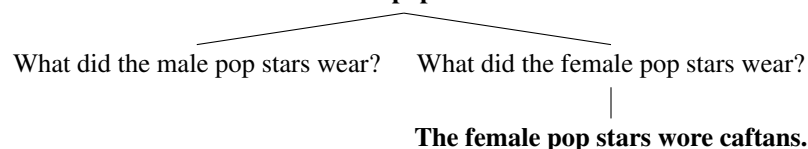


- Generally, CT-F structures identify a question and superquestion that they answer.
- CT-F structures have multiple discourse functions that the d-trees can represent.

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



- (17) a. A: What did the pop stars wear? (Büring 2003)  
B: The  $[\text{female}]_{CT}$  popstars wore  $[\text{caftans}]_F$ .  
b. What did the pop stars wear?



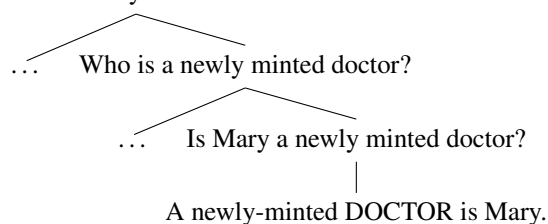
## 4 Contrastive is the right kind of topic for SCC subjects

- SCC subjects are topics, but neither givenness nor aboutness are sufficient
- Fully given subjects are infelicitous, partially given subjects are acceptable

- (18) 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.
- The SCCs do not have to be completely *about* their subject DP.
- (19) **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.
- (20) *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*

- (21) **Context:** David Bowie is my favourite singer.  
 a. Mary said my favourite singer is Iggy Pop (*de re/de dicto*)  
 b. 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
- (22) a. A NEWLY-minted doctor is Mary.  
 b. A newly-MINTED doctor is Mary.  
 c. A newly-minted DOCTOR is Mary.  
 d. #A newly-minted doctor is Mary.
- Each of the intonation patterns in (22-a–c) can be used in a distinct set of discourse contexts
  - The discourse contexts of SCCs are identical to canonical CT-Foc structures
- (23) Monica's been a doctor for a decade.  
 a. A NEWLY-minted doctor is Mary.  
 b. #A newly-minted DOCTOR is Mary.
- The intonation pattern in (23-b) is infelicitous because it incorrectly marks *doctor* as novel and *newly-minted* as given
- (24) A newly-minted DOCTOR is Mary.  
 Who is a newly-minted what?



- (25) **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 (25).
- (26) **CT condition on SCC subjects (part two):**  
 The entire SCC subject must not be CT-Marked
- Consider the CT-Foc structure of (27)
- (27) \*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,  $a [doctor]_{CT}$  is equivalent to  $[a doctor]_{CT}$
- So, (27) 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 (27) with a stressed indefinite article (*i.e.* [ej]) is more acceptable than (27) as is.

(28) ? $A_{CT}$  doctor is Mary

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

(29) A: You must be the professor  
B: I'm  $A_F$  professor

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

### (30) 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.

(31) 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.”

–  $one = w-+an$

- 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

(32) a.  $w-CT$ -an doctor is Mary.  
b. an-  $-other_{CT}$  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.

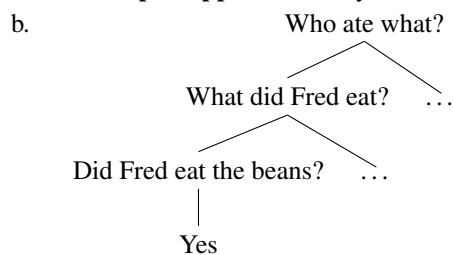
(33) **The general constraint on CT-Foc structures:**

A CT-Foc structured utterance must contain both novel/contrastive material and given/presupposed material.

- Consider the prototypical CT-Foc structure.

(34) (What about FRED? What did HE eat?)  
FRED<sub>CT</sub> ate [the BEANS]<sub>F</sub>.

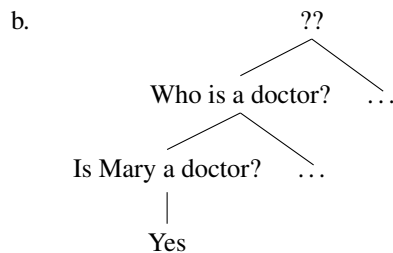
- a. **Focus:** the beans  
**CT:** Fred  
**Given/presupposed:** x ate y



- Compare this to an ill-formed SCC

(35) \*A doctor is Mary

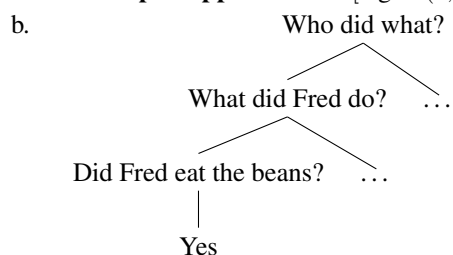
- a. **Focus:** Mary  
**CT:** A doctor  
**given/presupposed:** ∅

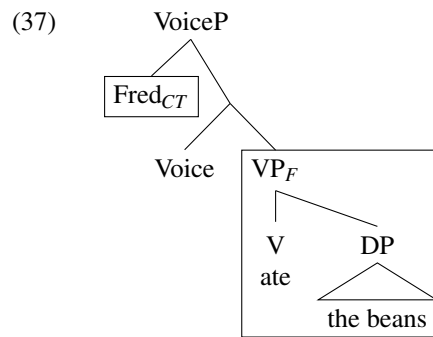


- Even in cases where the entire *pronounced* utterance is CT- or Foc-marked there is some *unpronounced* given material

(36) (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:**  $\exists x \exists e [\text{Agent}(x, e)]$





## 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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