

Definites vs. indefinites in Functional Relative Clauses

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Workshop Choice Functions and Natural Language Semantics

European Summerschool in Logic, Language and Information (ESSLI XIII)

Helsinki August 2001

In this talk we discuss some aspects of the interpretation of relative clauses and argue that a view of their semantics in terms of functions can capture a number of their properties in a more satisfactory way than analyses based on Quantifier Raising or 'reconstruction' (Quantifier Lowering). The epsilon operator allows us to capture the apparently conflicting properties of indefinites in relative clauses and maintain a functional approach for donkey-relatives.

Bianchi 1999 and Bhatt 2000 among others observe that the definiteness of a relative head NP affects quantifier scope. Thus, while 'the two patients each doctor will examine' allows a distributive reading, in (2) 'two patients each doctor will examine' only the collective reading is available. Such facts have been explained in terms of Kayne's hypothesis that the definite determiner is base-generated externally and that the numeral NP 'reconstructs' to its base-position. After reconstruction, 'two patients' is within the scope of the universal in (1), but not in (2), where the numeral 'two', in the absence of a definite determiner, occupies the external determiner position and cannot therefore appear within the scope of the universal.

We will argue that this analysis faces various problems, not least the fact that it cannot capture the contrast between the definite and indefinite in (3) 'the/a patient each doctor will examine', which is parallel to that exhibited by (1) and (2) (with the definite and indefinite head respectively). In both cases it is the bare NP 'patient' that reconstructs and both sentences are predicted to allow the same readings (it is also not clear which quantifier should be associated with a bare NP). Further, it cannot capture the binding of the matrix pronoun 'him' by 'every man' in the (marginal) (4) 'the woman every man hugged pinched him', since, the matrix pronoun is not c-commanded by the universal.

We will argue that the contrasts associated with the definiteness of the head can find a more natural explanation under the view that relative clauses, like wh-questions, involve functional dependencies (as proposed in Sharvit 1999). More precisely, the functional approach predicts that, when the relative is headed by an indefinite, the value of the function is undefined. This is so because, for e.g. when (3) is headed by 'a patient', there is no unique patient that can be mapped to 'each doctor'. The functional reading is thus unavailable. The question arising then is how the indefinite is bound by the universal in standard 'donkey-anaphora' sentences such as (5) 'every man who has a donkey beats it'. Crucially, if the relation involving an indefinite is not functional in (2&3) why this is not so in (5) (in relation to this see Heim 1990, who stipulates local accommodation of a uniqueness presupposition for 'a donkey' in order to 'save' the functional/e-type analysis of 5). We will argue that the difference between (2&3) and (5) lies in the interpretation of the indefinite NP in these two types of sentences. Unlike (2&3), the interpretation of the indefinite in (5) does not correspond to that of an existentially quantified NP. Rather, it is best captured by the epsilon operator which seems to convey the functional reading. (Skolemizing the existential quantifier would also provide a functional reading but, unlike the epsilon operator, would force an interpretation in which every man is assigned a unique donkey, which is not what (5) means). Linguistic evidence for this analysis will draw from a comparison with Greek. In Greek, the indefinite in (5) (but not 2) corresponds to a bare singular (rather than a NP with an indefinite determiner as in English). The difference in the interpretation of the corresponding indefinite will also be argued to be the source of the acceptability

contrast between (5) and (4) (under the bound reading for the matrix (e-type) pronoun). (Both examples should be equally good, since they involve the same syntactic configuration).

We will conclude with a comparison between non-identity relative clauses and identity ones (as in (6) 'the woman every man hugged was his mother') which have also been argued to involve a functional dependency.