

Choice Functions and the Anaphoric Semantics of Definite NPs

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Choice functions are commonly used for representing indefinite NPs in LF for reasons of scope behavior, while definite NPs are analyzed according to Russell's classical theory. However, this view is restricted to sentence semantics and, therefore, it assumes static meanings of definite and indefinite NPs. Once we extend our analysis to (small fragments of) discourses, the picture changes dramatically: Indefinite expressions receive a context change potential, while anaphoric definite expressions must be interpreted according to the updated context. This is the approach of dynamic semantics, such as FCS, DRT or DPL. However, in these theories, there is no clear account of the semantics of anaphoric definite NPs, which are often analyzed as Russellian descriptions, i.e. as static terms that do not interact with the context change potential of other expressions.

Lewis (1979, 179) has already illustrated that this view cannot account for the different reference of the two occurrences of the definite NP *the cat* in (1).

(1) "the cat"

Imagine yourself with me as I write these words. In the room is a cat, Bruce, who has been making himself very salient by dashing madly about. He is the only cat in the room, or in sight, or in earshot. I start to speak to you:

The cat is in the carton. **The cat** will never meet our other cat, because our other cat lives in New Zealand. *Our New Zealand cat* lives with the Cresswells. And there he'll stay, because Miriam would be sad if **the cat** went away.

I will argue that anaphoric definite descriptions are crucially involved in the dynamics of context change: First they are dependent on the updated context, and second they themselves update a given context. Context change is reconstructed as the change of a contextual salience structure that can be represented by a choice function. An indefinite NP *a cat* changes these structure in that it assigns its referent to the set of cats as being the most salient one. A definite NP *the cat* refers to that most salient referent and updates the context in the following way: (i) it trivially updates the set of cats with the referent of the definite NP (which is already the most salient one); (ii) it updates also some supersets such that that referent becomes the most salient referent of the supersets. In this way we can account for the salience change of the set of cats from one cat (Bruce) to another cat (Bobby) by the definite expressions *our New Zealand cat*.

Lewis, David 1979. Scorekeeping in a Language Game. In: R. Bäuerle & U. Egli & A. von Stechow (eds.). *Semantics from Different Points of View*. Berlin; Heidelberg; New York: Springer, 172-187.