Fake nouns: On the role of content in reference

Dorothy Ahn
Rutgers University
dorothy.ahn@rutgers.edu

University of Graz
November 25, 2026

www.dorothyahn.com/handouts

Introduction

Referring expressions

definite expressions: expressions that refer to some given entity



- pronoun *she*
- description *the woman*
- demonstrative *that linguist*
- name *Dorothy*
- *epithet the weirdo*

Referring expressions

definite expressions: expressions that refer to some given entity



- pronoun *she*
- description *the woman*
- demonstrative *that linguist*
- name *Dorothy*
- *epithet the weirdo*

[Q] How are their semantics related to each other?

- mixed answer in the literature: uniform vs. distinct
- some of the fundamental ingredients of syntax and semantics rely on a dichotomy between two types of nouns: **pronouns vs. r-expressions**

pronouns vs. r-expressions

Pronouns and r-expressions are considered to be fundamentally different:

distribution-wise

Bindig Theory categorically linking three primitive noun categories (anaphors, pronouns, r-expressions) to certain distributions [Chomsky 1981; Reinhart 1983; Büring 2005]

(1) a. Jin$_i$ likes his$_i$ song.
b. *He$_i$ likes Jin's$_i$ song.

meaning-wise

(2) Every girl thinks that Mary likes {her / the girl}.
bound variable reading only available for pronouns

pronouns vs. r-expressions

The distinction is reflected in their syntactic/semantic representation:

pronouns vs. r-expressions

- pronouns as variables
- r-expressions as (involving) constants

pronouns vs. r-expressions

The distinction is reflected in their syntactic/semantic representation:

pronouns vs. r-expressions

- pronouns as variables
- r-expressions as (involving) constants

ingredient-wise

- ϕ features as presuppositions [Heim and Kratzer 1998; Sudo 2012]

(3) a. $[\![\text{[+fem]}]\!] = \lambda x : \textit{female}(x).x$

b. $[\![\text{she}_1]\!]^g$ g = {<1,jin>,<2,jimin>..}
= g(1), if g(1) is female

- descriptive content (like nouns) as predicates, sets or functions of entities

(4) a. $[\![\text{singer}]\!] = \{\text{jin, jimin}\} / \lambda x.\text{singer}(x)$

b. $[\![\text{the singer}]\!] = \iota\text{x. singer(x)}$

pronouns vs. r-expressions?

But many developments have challenged this strict dichotomy

Distributional overlap *'Principle C violations'*

r-expressions coconstrued with identical c-commanding r-expressions

- Zapotec, Hmong, Vietnamese, Thai, ...

(5) **Nít$_1$** phûut wâa **Nít$_1$** sabaaj
Nit say comp Nit comfortable
'Nit said that she's comfortable.' [Thai; Chaiphet and Jenks 2021; Lasnik 1986]

(6) R-yu'làà**a**'z ra **bxuuhahz** ra **bxuuhahz**
hab-like pl priest pl priest
'The priests like themselves.' [Zapotec; Black 1994; Lee 2003]

pronouns vs. r-expressions?

But many developments have challenged this strict dichotomy

Distributional overlap *'Principle C violations'*

r-expressions coconstrued with identical c-commanding r-expressions

- Zapotec, Hmong, Vietnamese, Thai, ...

(5) **Nít$_1$** phûut wâa **Nít$_1$** sabaaj
Nit say comp Nit comfortable
'Nit said that she's comfortable.' [Thai; Chaiphet and Jenks 2021; Lasnik 1986]

(6) R-yu'làà**a**'z ra **bxuuhahz** ra **bxuuhahz**
hab-like pl priest pl priest
'The priests like themselves.' [Zapotec; Black 1994; Lee 2003]

weakening Principle C: obviative theories [Reinhart 1983; Safir 2014]; reducing to economy [Gor and Syrett 2018; Schlenker 2005; Varaschin et al. 2026]

re-evaluating status of r-expressions [Chaiphet and Jenks 2021; Lee 2003]

Today's talk

semantic overlap

A novel parallel observed between ϕ of pronouns and NP of r-expressions

- fake features: ϕ inference of pronouns not part of focus alternatives
  [Heim 2008; von Heusinger 2007; Kratzer 2009, a.o.]

(7) Only Mary$_F$ did her homework.

a. Others (regardless of gender) didn't do their homework

Today's talk

semantic overlap

A novel parallel observed between ϕ of pronouns and NP of r-expressions

- fake features: ϕ inference of pronouns not part of focus alternatives
  [Heim 2008; von Heusinger 2007; Kratzer 2009, a.o.]

  (7) Only Mary$_F$ did her homework.

  a. Others (regardless of gender) didn't do their homework

- fake nouns: noun content of r-expressions not part of focus alternatives

  (8) kyoswunim-man kyoswunim nonmwun twu-pen ilkcyo
  prof-only prof paper 2-cl read
  'Only professor reads professor's paper twice, (others don't read their papers again.)'

Today's talk

semantic overlap

A novel parallel observed between ϕ of pronouns and NP of r-expressions

- fake features: ϕ inference of pronouns not part of focus alternatives
  [Heim 2008; von Heusinger 2007; Kratzer 2009, a.o.]

  (7) Only Mary$_F$ did her homework.

  a. Others (regardless of gender) didn't do their homework

- fake nouns: noun content of r-expressions not part of focus alternatives

  (8)

kyoswunim-man	kyoswunim	nonmwun	twu-pen	ilkcyo
prof-only	prof	paper	2-cl	read

  'Only professor reads professor's paper twice, (others don't read their papers again.)'

[Q] What about the pronouns and r-expression dichotomy?

Preview

There is no pronoun vs. r-expression dichotomy.
noun type does not determine distribution or interpretation

- ϕ and nouns as contributing predicative meaning
- difference in distribution due to pragmatic considerations

- a uniform account of all definite expressions (from pronouns to epithets)
- locating their differences in the pragmatics

Fake nouns

Fake features of pronouns

Phi-features of pronouns systematically ignored in certain contexts (leading to terms like 'fake indexicals/features') [Kratzer 1998; Heim 2008, a.o.]

- allows mismatched gender alternatives under focus operators

(9) Only Mary$_F$ did her homework. [Heim 2008; Kratzer 1998, a.o.]
= No one else (regardless of gender) did their homework

Fake features of pronouns

Phi-features of pronouns systematically ignored in certain contexts (leading to terms like 'fake indexicals/features') [Kratzer 1998; Heim 2008, a.o.]

- allows mismatched gender alternatives under focus operators

(9) Only Mary$_F$ did her homework. [Heim 2008; Kratzer 1998, a.o.]
= No one else (regardless of gender) did their homework

- allows sloppy readings with mismatching ϕ in ellipsis

(10) I did my homework, but you didn't [~~do~~ **your** ~~homework~~]. [Bassi 2021]

Fake features

→ **Features are not present in (some part of) the derivation**

- focus alternatives copy everything but f-marked element
  [Rooth 1985; Schwarzschild 1999]

(11) Jin$_F$ danced again.
ALT: {Sol danced again, Min danced again,..}
presupposition of *again* projects to alternatives

Fake features

→ **Features are not present in (some part of) the derivation**

- focus alternatives copy everything but f-marked element
  [Rooth 1985; Schwarzschild 1999]

  (11) Jin$_F$ danced again.
  ALT: {Sol danced again, Min danced again,..}
  presupposition of *again* projects to alternatives

(9) Only Mary$_F$ did her homework. [Heim 2008; Kratzer 1998, a.o.]
= No one else (regardless of gender) did their homework
ALT: {Jin did his hw, Jimin did his hw}
presupposition of *her* (female) *not* projected to alternatives

Fake features

→ **Features are not present in (some part of) the derivation**

- ellipsis is subject to an identity requirement
  - an elided XP must have a parallel structure/LF as antecedent XP
    [Sag 1976, Keenan 1971, Chomsky 1965, Ross 1969, a.o.]

    (12) *A taxi driver was called, but Sally didn't. [Stockwell 2024]
    voice mismatch violates identity condition

Fake features

→ **Features are not present in (some part of) the derivation**

- ellipsis is subject to an identity requirement
  - an elided XP must have a parallel structure/LF as antecedent XP
    [Sag 1976, Keenan 1971, Chomsky 1965, Ross 1969, a.o.]

    (12) *A taxi driver was called, but Sally didn't. [Stockwell 2024]
    voice mismatch violates identity condition

(10) I did my homework, but you didn't [~~do **your** homework~~]. [Bassi 2021]
person feature mismatch *does not* violate identity condition

Approaches

Some approaches in the literature

1. **weak projection**: ϕ doesn't project to focus values [Sauerland 2013]
   - 'pure' presuppositions do not have to be satisfied for alternatives
2. **minimal pronoun**: ϕ isn't in the derivation; in PF interface for Spell-Out
   - features transmitted through Agree (but late) [Kratzer 1998; Messick 2023]
   - features valued from contextual information [Bassi 2021]

$\rightarrow$ ϕ-features are fake because they are ϕ

- pure presuppositional triggers that do not have assertive content
  $[\![\text{[+fem]}]\!] = \lambda x : \mathit{fem}(x).x$
- things that can be syntactically transmitted/valued later in the PF

Challenge: fake nouns

Observation: nouns also show fakeness.

(13) In this old photo, only Mary$_F$ looks like Mary. [Roeper 2006]
= No one else looks like themselves
ALT = {Jin doesn't look like Jin, Jun doesn't look like Jun}

(14) *The linguist* used to believe that the students in *the linguist*'s class were happy, just as the philosopher did ~~[believe that the students in **the philosopher**'s class were happy]~~. [sloppy reading available; Safir 2014]

Almost no English data (other than Roeper 2006; Safir 2014 and Ahn 2024, 2026)

Challenge: fake nouns

Observation: nouns also show fakeness.

(13) In this old photo, only Mary$_F$ looks like Mary. [Roeper 2006]
= No one else looks like themselves
ALT = {Jin doesn't look like Jin, Jun doesn't look like Jun}

(14) *The linguist* used to believe that the students in *the linguist*'s class were happy, just as the philosopher did ~~[believe that the students in **the philosopher**'s class were happy]~~. [sloppy reading available; Safir 2014]

Almost no English data (other than Roeper 2006; Safir 2014 and Ahn 2024, 2026)

→ more productive in languages where pronouns can be replaced by names/nouns more readily (**Korean, Tagalog, Japanese,** ...)

Korean

Korean 2/3 reference

Nouns* can be used instead of pronouns, potentially due to honorification and/or the lack of a 3rd person pronoun

*nouns used like names/titles

(15) kyoswunim-man **kyoswunim** nonmwun twu-pen ilkcyo pothong
prof-only prof paper 2-cl read normal
salam-tul-un caki nonmwun tasi an ilkeyo.
person-pl-top self paper again neg read
'Only professor reads **professor**'s paper twice, others don't read their papers again.'

(16) emma-nun **emma**-il-ul hay-ss-ci, na-nun an hay-ss-e
mom-top mom-work-acc do-past-decl, I-top neg do-past-decl
'Mom did **mom**'s work, but I didn't ~~[do **my** work]~~'

White Hmong

White Hmong *self* phrases

White Hmong allows bare names (*Keng*), reflexives (pronoun `cl self`), and name+self (*Keng* `cl self`) to corefer with antecedent.

(17) Keng ib leeg nyiam Keng tus kheej
Keng one cl_{psn} like Keng cl self
'Only Keng likes himself.'
(Others don't like themselves) [Quartz Colvin 2026 in prep]

- Not possible with bare names, common nouns, titles, etc.

Japanese

Japanese nouns with honorific markers

Nouns with honorific marker like *-gata* (方) allow* fake reading

*Not perfect, but sounds better than using a bare noun *sensei*. [David Oshima, pc]

(18) Sensei-gata dake sensei-gata-no ronbun-o ni-kai
teacher-hon.pl only teacher-hon.pl-gen paper-acc two-cl
yonda(/yom-are-ta).
read-pst(/read-subj.hon-pst)
'Only the teachers read **the teachers'** own papers twice.'
(Others, teacher or not, didn't read their papers twice.)

Tagalog

Tagalog 2nd person reference

Nouns with proprial article *si/ni* used as 2nd person reference allow fakeness

[Gérard Avelino, pc]

(19) Si guro lang po ang nagbasa ng papel ni guro.
si teacher only hon ang read ng paper ni teacher
'Only teacher read **teacher**'s paper.'
(Others, teacher or not didn't read their own paper)

- *si* usually appears in front of referential names [Schachter and Otanes 1972]
- 2nd person reference, or indirectly 2nd person reference (Gérard Avelino pc)

si-marked nouns allow fakeness in Tagalog.

Fake modifiers

Fakeness extends beyond nouns.

- Other predicative content like modifiers can also be fake

English example There was an event at the linguistics department and a photographer came by and asked if he could take photos. Everyone was so shy that they said no. Jane, who came late because she had been sick for the whole week, was nice enough to tell him that he could take a photo of her.

(20) Only Jane let the photographer take a photo of her delicate self.
= Others, **delicate or not**, did not let the photographer take a photo of them.

- *delicate* is ignored in alternatives (n=20)

Japanese

Modifiers can* be fake in ellipsis in Japanese [Ryoichiro Kobayashi, pc]

*judgments vary, though could be QUD-sensitive [David Oshima, Satoshi Tomioka, pc]

(21) Yasuko-sensei-wa Seiko-ni-yorimo mazu sakini Chiaki-ni sikkaritosita
Yasuko-teacher-top Seiko-dat-than first early Chiaki-dat responsible
kanojo/zibun-no choosho-o mit-tu kangae-sase-ta.
she/self-gen strengths-acc 3-cl think-cause-pst
'Yasuko let Chiaki think about 3 strengths of responsible her/self earlier than (Yasuko let) Seiko ~~[think about 3 strengths of **responsible** her/self]~~.'

Summary of the issue

Expressions with descriptive content (nouns with hon. marking, si-marked nouns, modified reflexives, and definite descriptions)* allow bound readings, and the descriptive content does not project to alternatives.

*I'll call them 'fake nouns'

Issues

1. Traditionally assumed ι-based analysis of *the* combined with focus semantics (Rooth 1992, 1985) does not give us the right reading
2. Analyses for fake features derive this property from pure presuppositional/morphosyntactic nature

Issue 1: Focus semantics and ι

strict reading

*Assumption: nouns in Korean, Japanese, Tagalog are definite descriptions [Lee 1992, Ahn 2019, a.o.; see Dayal 2011]; Roothian focus semantics [Rooth 1992, 1985]

(22) $[_{\alpha}$ Only $[_{\beta}$ professor$_F$ reads professor's paper]]

a. $[\![[_{\beta}\ ..]]\!]^o = \lambda w : \exists!x[\mathit{prof}(x)].\mathit{read}(\iota x[\mathit{prof}(x)], \text{paper-of}(\iota x[\mathit{prof}(x)])$

b. $[\![[_{\beta}\ ..]]\!]^f = \{\lambda w : \exists!x[\mathit{prof}(x)].\mathit{read}(z, \text{paper-of}(\iota x[\mathit{prof}(x)]) \mid \text{z is a person}\}$

c. $[\![(22)]\!]$ = No one else reads the unique professor's paper

Issue 1: Focus semantics and ι

bound uses

*Assumption: *the* carries an anaphoric index in addition to NP in its restriction [Elbourne 2013; Schwarz 2009] so that it can be bound

(23) $[\![\text{the}_S]\!] = \lambda s_r.\lambda P.\lambda y\colon \exists!x(P(x)(s_r)\ \&\ x = y).\ \iota x[P(x)(s_r)\ \&\ x = y]$ [Schwarz 2009]

Issue 1: Focus semantics and ι

bound uses

*Assumption: *the* carries an anaphoric index in addition to NP in its restriction [Elbourne 2013; Schwarz 2009] so that it can be bound

(23) $[\![\text{the}_S]\!] = \lambda s_r.\lambda P.\lambda y\colon \exists!x(P(x)(s_r)\ \&\ x = y).\ \iota x[P(x)(s_r)\ \&\ x = y]$ [Schwarz 2009]

(24) [$_\alpha$ Only [$_\beta$ professor$_F$ λ_5 t_5 reads professor$_5$'s paper]

a. $[\![[_\beta$ ..$]]\!]^o = \lambda w : \exists!x[\mathit{prof}(x) \wedge x{=}5].\mathit{read}(5, \text{paper-of}(\iota x[\mathit{prof}(x) \wedge x{=}5]))$

b. $[\![[_\beta$ ..$]]\!]^f = \{\lambda w : \exists!x[\mathit{prof}(x) \wedge x{=}z].\mathit{read}(z, \text{paper-of}(\iota x[\mathit{prof}(x) \wedge x{=}z])) \mid z \in D_e\}$

c. $[\![(24)]\!]$ = No one else read the paper by the unique professor that is them

- each person has to be a unique professor (no 'fakeness')

Issue 2: ϕ vs. NP

ϕ is 'fake' because they are ϕ.

- **minimal pronouns.** get their features valued through syntactic transmission [Kratzer 1998] or morphosyntactic valuation [Bassi 2021]
  - nouns are not transmitted syntactically
- **weak projection.** ϕ do not project to alternatives because they are 'pure presuppositional triggers' [Sauerland 2013]
  - nouns are not pure presuppositional triggers

Intuition

It's not about phi. It's about indices.

- The presence of an index is what backgrounds/erases the content.

Combining intuitions of Weak projection and Minimal variables,
I propose the following alternative solution:

- **Separation of content and index**
  - at the truth-conditional level, only a pronoun with index
  - similar to minimal variables account
- **deriving fake nouns**
  - labels are use-conditional content
  - use-conditional contents do not project to focus alternatives
  - similar to weak projection

Separation of index and content

A detour to use-conditional content

What we need:
Minimal pronouns for the purpose of generating the right focus alternatives

(25) $[_{\alpha}$ Only $[_{\beta}$ professor$_F$ λ_5 t_5 reads professor$_5$'s paper$]$

a. $[\![[_{\beta}\ ..]]\!]^o = \lambda w.\mathit{read}(5, \text{paper-of}(5))$

b. $[\![[_{\beta}\ ..]]\!]^f = \{\lambda w.\mathit{read}(z, \text{paper-of}(z)) \mid z \in D_e\}$

[Q] What happens to the descriptive content?

[A] They become backgrounded labels!

Motivating UC

An important parallel:

1. Fake features and nouns not subject to identity under ellipsis:

(26) I did my homework, but you didn't [~~do~~ **your** ~~homework~~]. [B'21:(50)]

(27) *The linguist* used to believe that the students in *the linguist*'s class were happy, just as the philosopher did ~~[believe that the students in~~ **the philosopher**~~'s class were happy]~~. [S'14:(22)]

Motivating UC

An important parallel:

1. Fake features and nouns not subject to identity under ellipsis:

   (26) I did my homework, but you didn't [~~do **your** homework~~]. [B'21:(50)]

   (27) *The linguist* used to believe that the students in *the linguist*'s class were happy, just as the philosopher did [~~believe that the students in **the philosopher**'s class were happy~~]. [S'14:(22)]

2. Expressive content not subject to identity under ellipsis [Potts et al. 2009]:

   (28) a. I met that idiot in the movie theater.
   b. I did ~~meet that **idiot** in the movie theater~~ too, but he's no idiot.

Question: What if the parallel is due to them occupying the same layer?

A detour to descriptions whose 'fakeness' has been known — ***epithets***

Epithets

Epithets:

- described as having at least two properties [Patel-Grosz 2015]:
  1. 'epithets contain noun phrases that are used in a non-literal, 'emotional' way.' often derived using some kind of an 'expressive feature' [+EX]
  2. 'epithets are anaphoric, i.e. they refer back to another DP, or a contextually salient referent.' (p.1)
- epithets can be bound
  - relatively well-known exceptions to Principle C [Dubinsky and Hamilton 1998]

(29) Harry$_i$ ran over a man (who was) trying to give [the idiot]$_i$ directions.
[Patel-Grosz 2015: adapted from Dubinsky and Hamilton 1998]

→ Epithets as 'special pronouns' with expressive content.
broader categorization of conventional implicatures (CI) [Potts 2005]

Epithets and UC

CI content occupies a separate domain from truth-conditional content

[Potts 2005, Gutzmann 2015; McCready 2010]

(30) I saw that idiot Jin, who is the owner of the company, in the park.

- type-theoretic distinction between truth-conditional and use-conditional content [*adopting Gutzmann and McCready 2014]

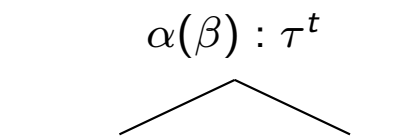
(31) truth-conditional content $[\![\cdot]\!]^t = \{w_1, w_2, ...\}$ S true in w_x iff $w_x \in [\![S]\!]^t$
use-conditional content $[\![\cdot]\!]^u = \{c_1, c_2, ...\}$ S felicitous in c_x iff $c_x \in [\![S]\!]^u$

(32) TC and UC types

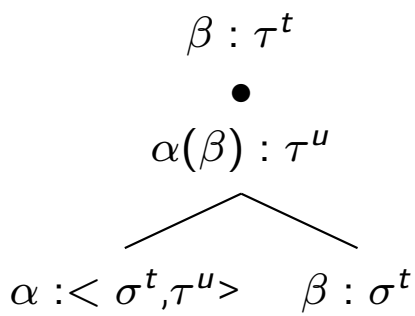
a. e,t are basic TC types.
b. u is a basic UC type.
c. If σ and τ are TC types, then $< \sigma, \tau >$ is a TC type.
d. If τ is a TC type, then $< \tau, u >$ is a UC type.

TC vs. UC domain

Truth-conditional application



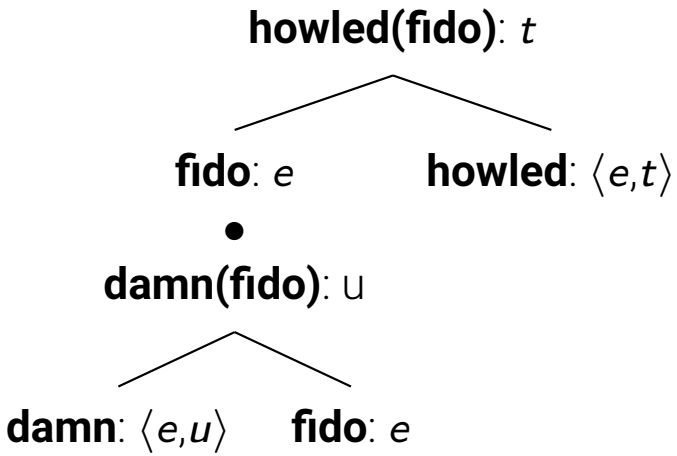
Use-conditional application



example with an expressive like *damn* (an <e,u> predicate)

(33) This damn dog howled the whole night. [Gutzmann and McCready 2014:(16)]

a. ⟦(33)⟧ = <howled(fido), {damn (fido)}>



TC vs. UC domain

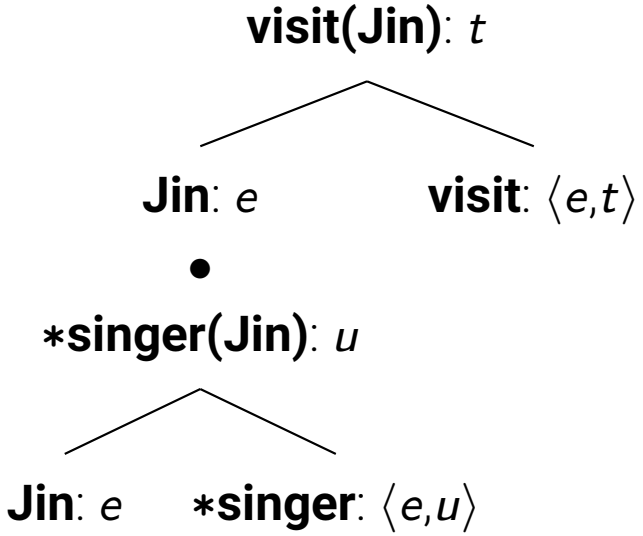
TC <e,t> content can be turned into UC <e,u> content

- $*$ operator [also Pott's (2005) `comma` operator]

(34) $* = \lambda f_{et} \lambda x.f(x) :<< e, t >, < e, u >>$ [Gutzmann and McCready 2014]

(35) Jin, a singer, visited.

a. $[\![(35)]\!]$ = <visit(Jin), {*singer(Jin)}>



Expressive content as UC

Epithets as special pronouns with expressive content [Patel-Grosz 2015; Potts 2005; Varaschin and Machicao Y Priemer to appear, a.o.]

(36) $[\![\text{the idiot}]\!] = x + *\text{idiot}$

- Accounts for
  1. Principle C (It is just a pronoun at TC)
  2. Scopelessness
     (UC content does not scope below TC operators [Potts 2005; Potts et al. 2009])

     (37) a. I met that idiot in the movie theater.
     b. I did ~~meet that **idiot** in the movie theater~~ too, but he's no idiot.

     (38) Only Jin_F is so peculiar that they decided to interview the weirdo.
     a. Others, weirdo or not, were not interviewed

Separation of index and content

Common denominator between epithets and fake nouns:
separation of index and content

→ **descriptive content as UC** (or at least non-truth-conditional)

Precursors:

1. **Fake indexicals** [Roberts 2014]
   I's indexicality has two parts: an index and a felicity condition that the index is identical to speaker(c)
2. **Referential descriptions** [Gutzmann and McCready 2014]
   a referential description *the murderer* has two parts: an index and a UC that *x* is the murderer

Roberts' Fake indexicals

Roberts 2014 *I* is indirectly anchored to doxastic centers

- not $[\![I]\!]^{c,g}$ = sp(c)

(39) $[\![I_i]\!]^{c,g} = g(x_i)$

a. I_i is felicitous if $g(x_i)$ is (weakly) familiar and $g(x_i)$ = sp(c) [simplified]

- separation of index on *I* (*i*) from identity with sp(c)

Roberts' Fake indexicals

Roberts 2014 *I* is indirectly anchored to doxastic centers

- not $[\![I]\!]^{c,g}$ = sp(c)

(39) $[\![I_i]\!]^{c,g} = g(x_i)$

a. I_i is felicitous if $g(x_i)$ is (weakly) familiar and $g(x_i) = sp(c)$ [simplified]

- separation of index on *I* (*i*) from identity with sp(c)

Accounts for fake indexicals

(40) Only I_F liked my first grade teacher.

a. strict reading: x_7 liked x_k's teacher where $g(x_k) = sp(c)$

b. sloppy reading: x_7 liked x_7's teacher

- 'Operators in the proferred content of an utterance only target proferred content, and here the anchoring is presupposed.' (p.39-40)

Roberts' Fake indexicals

We are not done yet.

- Unlike *I*, which lexically presupposes the felicity condition x=sp(c), nouns like *prof* do not inherently carry such presuppositions

I assume that prof is just a predicate $< e, t >$

$\rightarrow$ We need a mechanism of turning the predicate into a backgrounded label that requires professor(x)

Deriving fakeness

Reference: [content] + [index]



[description]

Reference

Reference: [content] + [index]



[description]

Reference

Reference uses 2 ingredients:

content and index

- content: linguistic description (noun, ϕ-information, etc.)
- index: deictic, anaphoric

[Ahn 2025b] Definite space defined by presence and overt marking of content and index

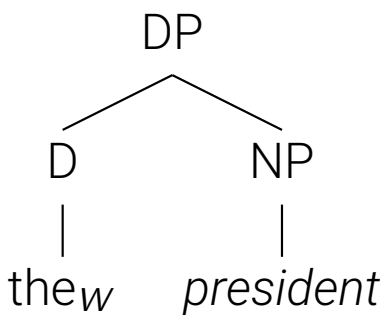
Implementation

Content and index can be represented in syntax and semantics:

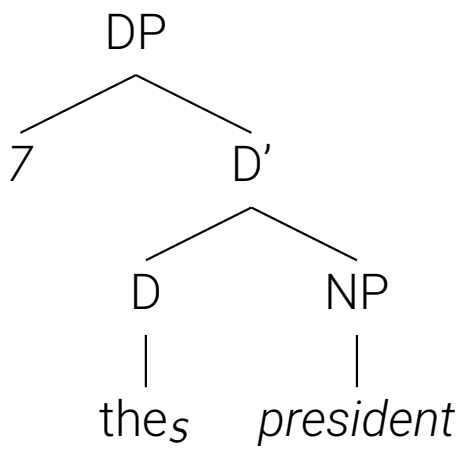
[Schwarz 2009, Elbourne 2008, Patel-Grosz and Grosz 2010, Ahn 2019, Jenks and Konate 2022]

syntax

plain definite



indexed definite



semantics $[\![DP]\!]^g = \iota x.[Pres(x)]$ $[\![DP]\!]^g = \iota x.[Pres(x) \wedge x = g(7)]$

Attributive vs Referential

In referring, we can decide to rely on content, index, or both

- when index is known (anaphoric), then content is not so necessary
- if index is not known (we don’t know who), content is all we have

Attributive vs Referential

In referring, we can decide to rely on content, index, or both

- when index is known (anaphoric), then content is not so necessary
- if index is not known (we don't know who), content is all we have

→ attributive vs. referential use [Donnellan 1966]

- **referential use:** famous misdescription use [Donnellan 1966]

  (41) (looking at a man with water) The man with a martini is tall.

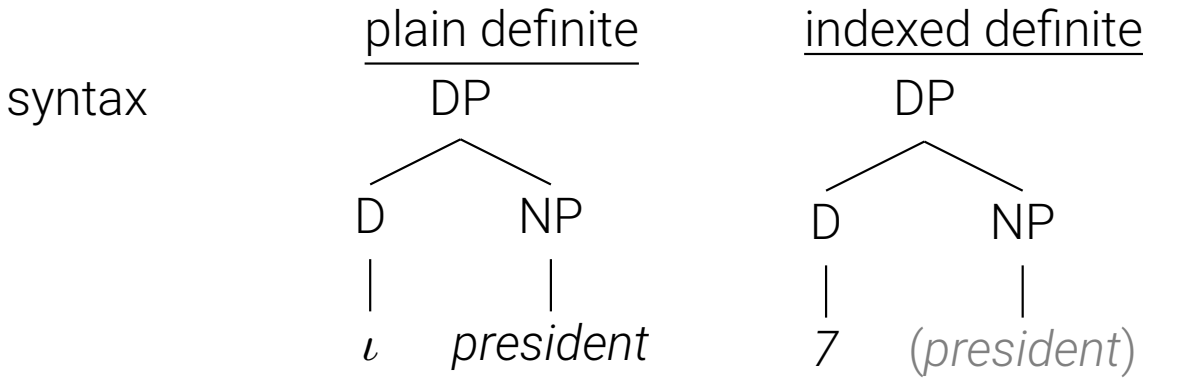
- **attributive use**: description has to be foregrounded

  (42) In the next party, the man with a martini will give the toast.

A different implementation

representing attributive vs. referential use

indexed definite just returns g(7) [Gutzmann and McCready 2014, Ahn 2024]



semantics $[\![DP]\!]^g = \iota x.[Pres(x)]$ $[\![DP]\!]^g = g(7)$ (if pres)

- for indexed definite, content is *backgrounded*
  - presupposed [Ahn 2024]
  - use-conditional [Gutzmann and McCready 2014]

Referential vs. attributive use

Gutzmann and McCready 2014 NP content of a referential definite as UC

> [Donnellan 1966:285] 'the referential use of the definite description is merely one tool for doing a certain job — calling attention to a person or thing — and in general any other device for doing the same job, another description or a name, would do as well. In the attributive use, the attribute of being the so-and-so is all important, while it is not in the referential use.'

(43) The leader of BTS is a writer.

a. RM is a writer. — propositional content

b. RM is the leader of BTS. — descriptive content

- propositional and descriptive content are independent from each other
- different from presuppositions where assertion relies on presupposition

Referential vs. attributive use

Gutzmann and McCready 2014 NP content of a referential definite as UC

> [Donnellan 1966:285] 'the referential use of the definite description is merely one tool for doing a certain job — calling attention to a person or thing — and in general any other device for doing the same job, another description or a name, would do as well. In the attributive use, the attribute of being the so-and-so is all important, while it is not in the referential use.'

(43) The leader of BTS is a writer.

a. RM is a writer. — propositional content
b. RM is the leader of BTS. — descriptive content

- propositional and descriptive content are independent from each other
- different from presuppositions where assertion relies on presupposition

→ accounts for misdescription uses

(44) (looking at a man with water) The man with a martini is tall. [Donnellan 1966]

- often treated as a uniqueness presupposition failure
- what fails is *man-with-martini*(g(7)) [Gutzmann and McCready 2014, Ahn 2024]

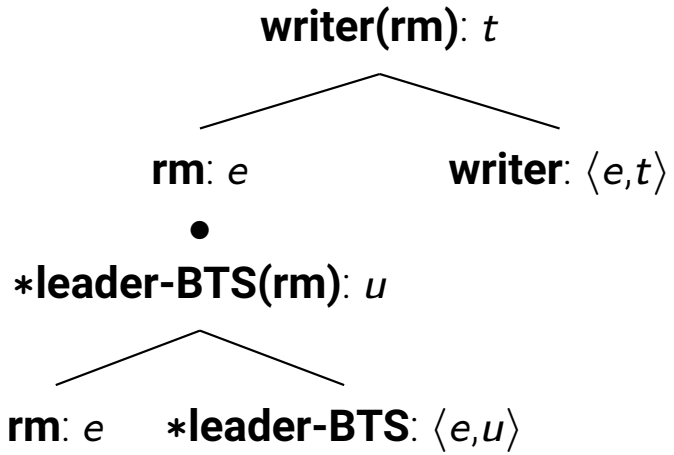
Referential *the* as a pronoun with UC content

Gutzmann and McCready 2014

- referential *the* as a pronoun with UC content
- descriptive content becomes <e,u> via ∗ due to type-mismatch

deriving referential interpretation of *the leader of BTS* as **x + ∗leader-BTS**

(45) ⟦The leader of BTS is a writer.⟧ = <writer(rm), {∗leader-BTS(rm)}>



Deriving fake nouns

Ingredients

Ingredients from the detour:

1. Observation that epithets also show fakeness
2. Separation of index and content

epithets	index	+	expressive content	[P'05, V&MP'26]
indexicals	index	+	anchoring	[Roberts 2014]
ref. descriptions	index	+	noun content	[G&M'14]

- index in the truth-conditional domain
- content presupposed or UC

Coming back to fake nouns

(recall) **It's not about phi. It's about indices.**

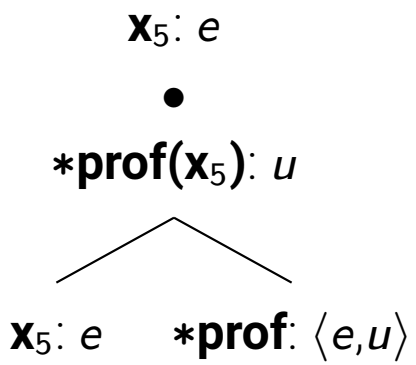
- The presence of indexed pronoun is what backgrounds the content.

Implementation: The presence of an index backgrounds the predicative content as a UC label

1. Nominal content as $< e, t >$ predicates
2. Ambiguity falls on presence and absence of index:
   - If index is present, content becomes a UC label due to type-mismatch
   - If no index, predicate is subject to: ι, quantifier *the* [Pupa 2022]

Deriving bound descriptions

(46) *professor* = x + *prof



(47) [$_\alpha$ Only [$_\beta$ professor$_F$ λ_5 t_5 reads professor$_5$'s paper]

a. $[\![[_\beta \ldots]]\!]^o = \lambda w.\mathit{read}(5, \text{paper-of}(5))$

b. $[\![[_\beta \ldots]]\!]^f = \{\lambda w.\mathit{read}(z, \text{paper-of}(z)) \mid z \in D_e\}$

c. $[\![(47)]\!]$ = <No one other than 5 read their own paper, {*prof(5)}>

Broader fakeness

(recall) **It's not about phi. It's about indices.**

- The presence of indexed pronoun is what backgrounds the content.

Implementation: The presence of an index backgrounds the predicative content as a UC label

1. Nominal ϕ**, name, epithet** content as $< e, t >$ predicates
2. Ambiguity falls on presence and absence of index:
   - If index is present, content becomes a UC label due to type-mismatch
   - If no index, predicate is subject to other argumentizing operations ι, $\cap$ quantifier *the* [Pupa 2022], generic interpretation not fixed to specific morphology [Krifka et al. 1995]

Attributive vs. referential dichotomy

Attributive vs. referential dichotomy extends beyond nouns

ϕ of a pronoun and NP of a definite description are subject to one underlying mechanism [Ahn 2024]

Both can be backgrounded:

(48) a. {She / Every kid} is drinking coffee.
b. {The linguist / Every linguist} drank the coffee that I made for the linguist.

Both can be used attributively:

(49) a. I don't know HER personally, because he is a man. [Sudo 2012]
b. I don't know the LINGUIST personally, because she is an astronomer.

(50) a. In a QP defense, the student presents and the advisor asks questions.
b. In every 1960s marriage it was understood that he should take out the garbage and she should wash the dishes. [Roberts 2023 LSA]

ϕ as a predicate

ϕ as restrictions in the literature

- [Esipova 2018] Semantic ϕ-features treated as <e,t> modifiers
- [Postal 1966] Pronouns as descriptions that carry features like [+masc,+3rd,+refl] instead of NPs in deep structure
- [von Heusinger 2002] *she* as 'the most salient one of the set of female individuals'
- [Ahn 2019] both ϕ and NP as restrictions to ι

(51) a. $[\![\text{the linguist}]\!] = \iota x.\ \text{linguist}(x)$
b. $[\![\text{she}]\!] = \iota x.\ \text{female}(x)$

$\rightarrow$ ϕ is a predicate, but becomes a label when there is an index
(This is often the case, unless marked for attributive use)

(52) *she* = x + $*$female

A nice consequence: reducing fake features to UC

Fake features subsumed under UC projection behavior.

(53) [$_{\alpha}$ Only [$_{\beta}$ Mary$_{F}$ λ_5 t_5 did her$_5$ homework]

a. $[\![[_{\beta}\ ..]]\!]^{o} = \lambda w.did(5, \text{homework}(5))$

b. $[\![[_{\beta}\ ..]]\!]^{f} = \{\lambda w.did(z, \text{homework}(z)) \mid z \in D_e\}$

c. $[\![(53)]\!]$ = <No one else other than 5 did their homework, {*female(5)}>

A nice consequence: reducing fake features to UC

Fake features subsumed under UC projection behavior.

(53) [$_{\alpha}$ Only [$_{\beta}$ Mary$_{F}$ λ_5 t$_5$ did her$_5$ homework]

a. $[\![[_{\beta}\ ..]]\!]^{o} = \lambda w.did(5, \text{homework}(5))$

b. $[\![[_{\beta}\ ..]]\!]^{f} = \{\lambda w.did(z, \text{homework}(z)) \mid z \in D_e\}$

c. $[\![(53)]\!]$ = <No one else other than 5 did their homework, {*female(5)}>

- ϕ analyzed as UC content in Gutzmann and McCready 2014, too
- Here, assuming full parallel between nominal content and ϕ content

A nice consequence: reducing fake features to UC

Fake features subsumed under UC projection behavior.

(53) [$_{\alpha}$ Only [$_{\beta}$ Mary$_{F}$ λ_5 t_5 did her$_5$ homework]

a. $[\![[_{\beta}\ ..]]\!]^{o}$ = $\lambda w.did(5, \text{homework}(5))$

b. $[\![[_{\beta}\ ..]]\!]^{f}$ = $\{\lambda w.did(z, \text{homework}(z)) \mid z \in D_e\}$

c. $[\![(53)]\!]$ = <No one else other than 5 did their homework, {*female(5)}>

- ϕ analyzed as UC content in Gutzmann and McCready 2014, too
- Here, assuming full parallel between nominal content and ϕ content

Advantages

- No separate mechanism (syntactic transmission, pure presupposition) needed
- A uniform account for fake nouns (for *all* fakeness?)

Broad fakeness

Fakeness, then, is predicted of *all* expressions with indices.

- UC analysis of names [Gutzmann and McCready 2014]

(54) a. $[\![\text{Jin}]\!]^t = x_7$
b. $[\![\text{Jin}]\!]^u = *\text{jin}(x)$

- modifiers of *her*/self in Japanese/English

(55) a. $[\![\text{responsible self}_7]\!]^t = x_7$
b. $[\![\text{responsible self}_7]\!]^u = *\text{responsible}(x_7)$

Broad fakeness

Fakeness, then, is predicted of *all* expressions with indices.

- UC analysis of names [Gutzmann and McCready 2014]

(54) a. $[\![\text{Jin}]\!]^t = x_7$
b. $[\![\text{Jin}]\!]^u = *\text{jin}(x)$

- modifiers of *her*/self in Japanese/English

(55) a. $[\![\text{responsible self}_7]\!]^t = x_7$
b. $[\![\text{responsible self}_7]\!]^u = *\text{responsible}(x_7)$

Uniform prediction of fakeness

(56) a. Only Mary did her homework.
b. Only prof reads prof's paper. [Korean, Tagalog]
c. Only Nit thinks Nit is smart. [Thai, Chaiphet and Jenks 2021]
d. Only Jane let the photographer take a photo of her delicate self.

Summary

1. New observation: Fake nouns When a noun-containing description is bound, the noun content is ignored in focus alternatives.

2. Proposal: Nouns as labels in uses with indices

- In a referential use (involving an indexed pronoun), NP content becomes a UC label
- UC content is not subject to further TC operations → deriving fakeness
- This analysis can extend to all expressions with indices (pronouns, epithet, names)
    - modified *self*/pronoun cases ('delicate self', 'responsible her') as evidence

Fake nouns allow us to separate morphology from reference strategy

Labels

More on labels

What is a label really? Is it just *prof(x) or can it be more specific?

1. There are many UC contents, with varied selectional properties

(57)
a. $[\![\text{damn}]\!]^u$ = {c: cS feels negatively about x in c}
b. $[\![\text{frankly}]\!]^u$ = {c: cS is being honest about p}
c. $[\![\texttt{alloc. hon}]\!]^u$ = {c: cS honors cA}
d. $[\![\text{she}]\!]^u$ = {c: x is female in c}
e. $[\![\text{prof}]\!]^u$ = {c: x is prof in c}

- UC content taking arguments (x_7, proposition, cS)
  (from description, honorification, expressives, social meaning, etc.)

- General difference between labels and other UC content:
  i. labels necessarily select for an e entity
  (unlike expressives)
  ii. not inherently/lexically UC
  (unlike honorifics, etc.)

Labels vs. UC

2. Can epithets, names, and nouns be given a uniform treatment? Can they all just be predicates on the entity?

(58) a. $[\![\text{o yeca}]\!]^u$ = {c: rural(x) in c}
b. $[\![\text{she}]\!]^u$ = {c: female(x) in c}
c. $[\![\text{prof}]\!]^u$ = {c: prof(x) in c}

→ Slurs need more (slur use of *yeca* requires that the person has 'epistemically accessible' properties often associated with a rural person [Varaschin and Machicao Y Priemer to appear])

Labels vs. UC

2. Can epithets, names, and nouns be given a uniform treatment? Can they all just be predicates on the entity?

(58) a. $[\![\text{o yeca}]\!]^u$ = {c: rural(x) in c}
b. $[\![\text{she}]\!]^u$ = {c: female(x) in c}
c. $[\![\text{prof}]\!]^u$ = {c: prof(x) in c}

→ Slurs need more (slur use of *yeca* requires that the person has 'epistemically accessible' properties often associated with a rural person [Varaschin and Machicao Y Priemer to appear])

- **But then, is P(x) ever enough?** Can all misgendering/misdescriptions fall under this epistemically accessible property?

(59) (looking at someone who is very tiny) The kid is running!

Labels vs. UC

2. Can epithets, names, and nouns be given a uniform treatment? Can they all just be predicates on the entity?

(58) a. $[\![\text{o yeca}]\!]^u$ = {c: rural(x) in c}
b. $[\![\text{she}]\!]^u$ = {c: female(x) in c}
c. $[\![\text{prof}]\!]^u$ = {c: prof(x) in c}

→ Slurs need more (slur use of *yeca* requires that the person has 'epistemically accessible' properties often associated with a rural person [Varaschin and Machicao Y Priemer to appear])

- **But then, is P(x) ever enough?** Can all misgendering/misdescriptions fall under this epistemically accessible property?

(59) (looking at someone who is very tiny) The kid is running!

- In fact, P(x) is not necessary either

Arbitrary labels

Labels can be arbitrary:

- Names: arbitrary in the sense that the only relevant property of a name *Jin* is being *named* Jin.
- This applies to other arbitrarily-introduced labels too:

(60) I saw this poet, who I will call A, and this linguist, who I will call B, at the conference last night. **A** greeted me kindly, but **B** seemed upset about something.

  - There is nothing about x that is ***A*** (A(x) doesn't mean much)

Arbitrary labels

ASL loci



boy IX-LOCUS$_a$ girl IX-LOCUS$_b$ sit class IX-LOCUS$_a$ read
'There's this boy and this girl. They sit in class. That one [the boy] reads.'

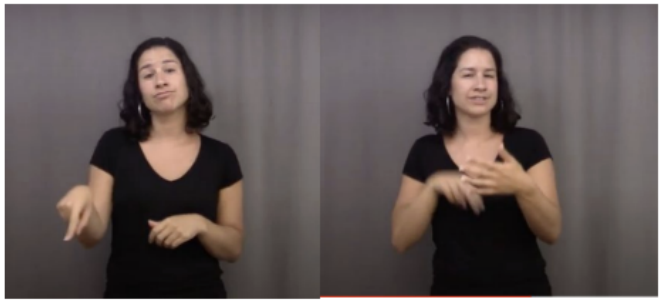
[Ahn et al. 2026]:

IX_A in referential expressions are fundamentally spatial and encodes association with some location

Arbitrary labels

Loci in sign languages as arbitrary labels





(61) a. $[\![IX_{LOC}]\!] = \lambda o.\lambda x.R(x, o)$

b. $[\![IX_A]\!] = [\![IX_{LOC}]\!](A) = [\lambda o.\ \lambda x.\ R(x,o)](a) = \lambda x.\ R(x,a)$
'associated with location a' (where a is the location represented by A)

- Loci appear in bound cases (Schlenker 2011)
- But A(x) is not meaningful: x is not at A.
- x is merely associated with A

Labels vs. UC

2. Can epithets, names, and nouns be given a uniform treatment? Can they all just be predicates on the entity?

(62) a. $[\![\text{o yeca}]\!]^u$ = {c: rural(x) in c}
b. $[\![\text{she}]\!]^u$ = {c: female(x) in c}
c. $[\![\text{prof}]\!]^u$ = {c: prof(x) in c}

P(x) is not sufficient: misdescriptions/misgendering cases
P(x) is not necessary: arbitrary labels

→ P(x) in the context is not what we need

→ What we need: **anchoring to a doxastic center** [Roberts 2014]

- *o yeca* means rural *to me*
- *she* means female *to me*
- *prof* means prof *to me*

'what do you mean *de re*, we are all *de se*!'

de se labels

recall l_i in Roberts 2014

(63) $[\![l_i]\!]^{c,g}$ = <g(d_i),{g(d_i) = sp(c)}> [simplified, UC-fied]

(64) a. $[\![\text{o yeca}]\!]^u$ = {c: rural(x)(sp(c)) in c}
b. $[\![\text{she}]\!]^u$ = {c: female(x)(sp(c)) in c}
c. $[\![\text{prof}]\!]^u$ = {c: prof(x)(sp(c)) in c}

- applies to names and arbitrary labels, too

(65) a. $[\![\text{A}]\!]^u$ = {c: A(x)(sp(c)) in c}

We need an operator that turns P(x) into P(x)(sp(c)) upon meeting an index.

RM-operator

RM (reference maker) operator

a label-creating operator

(66) $[\![\text{RM}]\!] = \lambda P_{<e,t>}.\lambda x_e.*R(x)(^{\cap}P)(sp(c))$

RM takes a predicate *P* and

- turns it into UC (with $*$)
  - accounts for independence of label content from TC
  - accounts for backgroudned/fakeness
- requires some relation (*R*) to hold between *x* and $^{\cap}P$ for $sp(c)$
  - most conventional: *R* = P(x) — pronouns, descriptions
  - most arbitrary: *R* = some relation btwn x and P — epithets, A

  $\rightarrow$ in general, attribution of *P* to *x* is anchored to sp(c)

Overt RM

Mr/Ms. as namefier [Chen 2025, Chen in prep]

(67) $[\![\text{Mr}]\!] = \lambda P_{\tau} \lambda w \lambda x : [male(x) \wedge R_{<\tau,et>}(P)(x)]$.x bears P at w, where τ is a variable over types [Chen 2025]

- labels can be completely random (as long as there is a clear signal)

(68) Mr. Mom, Mr. Dog, Mr.I-like-hats

(69) a. Si ginoo-ng naka-suot ng sombrero.
prop Mr.-linker asp-wear gen hat
'Mr. He-Wore-A-Hat'

b. Ang ginoo-ng naka-suot ng sombrero.
the gentleman-linker asp-wear gen hat
'The gentleman who wore a hat.' [Tagalog; Chen 2024:(47)]

→ difference between *she* and arbitrary labels may be reduced to signal strength

Anchoring to sp(c)

Prediction of sp(c) instead of just '$P(x)$ in c'

RM might anchor P attribution to a different attitude holder

- Indexicals like *now*, *here* can be anchored to a non-speaker attitude holder in Free Indirect Discourse (FID) [Roberts 2014]
- FID has binding consequences: disallowing D-pro while allowing P-pro, etc. [Hinterwimmer 2018]

Fake nouns can be part of attitude-holder's beliefs [Ryan Walter Smith, pc]

(70) (Min is very confused. She believes A to be a professor, B to be a grad student, and C to be a farmer, when it fact none of these people are in the positions she believes they are in. She further believes that A, B, and C are being trailed by spies, but that only A is aware that they are being trailed by one of these spies. So...

a. Min believes that only [the professor]$_F$ is aware of [the professor]'s spy. (Asserts: Mary believes that [no one else]$_i$ is aware of [their]$_i$ spy)

Conclusion

Summary

1. Nouns can be fake. Their descriptive content can disappear from focus alternatives just like ϕ-features.

2. Fakeness tracks index-based reference, not phi When an index identifies the referent, descriptive content can become a backgrounded label.

3. The fundamental divide is not pronoun vs. r-expression. It is content-based vs. index-based reference.

pronouns, descriptions, names, demonstratives, epithets differ primarily in what content they carry and how strongly they signal a reference strategy.

Implications

Referential expressions: various expressions which have been highlighted for different characteristics

pronouns	bindability, variables, fake features
descriptions	uniqueness, choice-functions
demonstratives	rigidity, anti-uniqueness, gesture
names	predicative vs. referential
epithets	expressive, not-at-issue nature

A broad question: How are their semantics related to each other?

Implications

Referential expressions: various expressions which have been highlighted for different characteristics

pronouns	bindability, variables, fake features
descriptions	uniqueness, choice-functions
demonstratives	rigidity, anti-uniqueness, gesture
names	predicative vs. referential
epithets	expressive, not-at-issue nature

A broad question: How are their semantics related to each other?

$\rightarrow$ They are all $< e, t >$ predicates!

- They can all be attributive or referential
- When carrying an index, they become a label

Why so different?

[Q] But why are they so different?

- they carry different <e,t> content
- their content signals different kinds of reference strategy



- pronoun *she*
- description *the woman*
- demonstrative *that linguist*
- name *Dorothy*
- *epithet the weirdo*

Why so different?

[Q] But why are they so different?

→ reduced to differences in content and the pragmatics of using content

1. Informativity and attributive vs. referential tendency
   - Pronouns used referentially much more than attributively
   - Definites readily used attributively
2. Markedness
   - Definites carry more content
   - subject to pragmatic economy [Schlenker 2005]
3. Signal strength
   - Pronouns may signal a referential use
   - *-nim*, *-gata*, *si* marking serve as signals of referential use
     *English: *the Pope* vs. *your highness* [Chris Barker, Anna Szabolcsi, pc]

Some other thoughts and connections

Are you saying all definite expressions are epithets? [Luca Gasparri, pc]

- Yes! $*R(x)(^{\cap}P)(sp(c))$
- R has a potential to be metalinguistic (arbitrary labels)
- Connections to grammatical features [Beaver & Onea, yesterday]

Some other thoughts and connections

Are you saying all definite expressions are epithets? [Luca Gasparri, pc]

- Yes! $*R(x)(^{\cap}P)(sp(c))$
- R has a potential to be metalinguistic (arbitrary labels)
- Connections to grammatical features [Beaver & Onea, yesterday]

What makes an expression referential?

- Any expression with an index [Schwarz 2009; Ahn 2024; Jenks and Konate 2022]
  - But quantifier-bound variables?

    (71) Every girl likes her mother, (?who is a Rutgers alum). [Simon Charlow, pc]

- Maybe it's not about index, but about being given and therefore not-at-issue [Simons, Tonhauser, Beaver, and Roberts 2010]

Thank you!



'That woman is a woman!'

[*Shakespeare in Love*, 1998]

[Michael Glanzberg, pc]

References

Ahn, Dorothy. 2019. *THAT* thesis: A competition mechanism for anaphoric expressions. Doctoral dissertation, Harvard University.

Ahn, Dorothy. 2022. Indirectly direct: An account of demonstratives and pronouns. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 45:1345–1393.

Ahn, Dorothy. 2024. A four-way distinction in English definite expressions. In *Proceedings of Sinn und Bedeutung 28*, ed. by Geraldine Baumann, Daniel Gutzmann, Jonas Koopman, Kristina Liefke, Agata Renans, and Tatjana Scheffler, volume 28, 1–17. Bochum: Ruhr-University Bochum.

Ahn, Dorothy. 2025a. Bare nouns competing with pronouns. *Korean Journal of Linguistics* 50:737–763.

Ahn, Dorothy. 2025b. Definite expressions with and without deixis. In *Proceedings of the 41st west coast conference on formal linguistics*, ed. by Nikolas Webster, Yağmur Kiper, Richard Wang, and Sichen Larry Lyu, 1–17. Cascadilla Proceedings Project.

Ahn, Dorothy. 2026. Fake nouns: Reconsidering the role of presupposition in reference. In *Proceedings of LENLS21*.

Ahn, Dorothy, Annemarie Kocab, and Kathryn Davidson. 2026. Pragmatics of spatial descriptions: Sign language loci. *Language* 102:1–40.

Bassi, Itai. 2021. Fake feature and valuation from context. Doctoral dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Black, Cheryl A. 1994. Quiegolani Zapotec syntax. Doctoral dissertation, University of California, Santa Cruz.

Büring, Daniel. 2005. *Binding theory*. Cambridge University Press.

Chaiphet, Khanin, and Peter Jenks. 2021. Names as complex indices: On apparent Condition C violations in Thai. In *Nels 51: Proceedings of the Fifty-First Annual Meeting of the North East Linguistic Society*, ed. by Alessa Farinella and Angelica Hill, volume 1. GLSA.

Chen, Jiayuan. 2025. A compositional semantics of quasi-names and titles. In *Syntax as the hub: Exploring the syntax-semantics interface and form-meaning mismatches, proceedings of sicogg27*, ed. by Arum Kang, volume 27, 31–40.

Chomsky, Noam. 1981. *Lectures on Government and Binding*.

Dayal, Veneeta. 2011. Bare noun phrases. In *Semantics: An International Handbook of Natural Language Meaning*, ed. by Paul Portner, Klaus von Heusinger, and Claudia Maienborn, volume 33, 1087–1108. De Gruyter Mouton.

Donnellan, Keith S. 1966. Reference and definite descriptions. *The Philosophical Review* 281–304.

Dubinsky, Stanley, and Robert Hamilton. 1998. Epithets as antilogophoric pronouns. *Linguistic Inquiry* 29:685–693.

Elbourne, Paul. 2008. Demonstratives as individual concepts. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 31:409–466.

Elbourne, Paul. 2013. *Definite descriptions*. Oxford University Press.

Esipova, Masha. 2018. Composition and projection of adnominal content across modalities. ms .

Gor, Vera, and Kristen Syrett. 2018. Beyond Principle C:(Not)-at-issueness and plausibility influence acceptability of coconstrual. *Proceedings of the 54th Annual Chicago Linguistic Society Meeting* .

Gutzmann, Daniel. 2015. *Use-conditional meaning: Studies in multidimensional semantics*, volume 6. OUP Oxford.

Gutzmann, Daniel, and Elin McCready. 2014. Using descriptions. *Empirical Issues in Syntax and Semantics* 10:55–72.

Harley, Heidi, and Elizabeth Ritter. 2002. Person and number in pronouns: A feature-geometric analysis. *Language* 78:482–526.

Heim, Irene. 2008. Features on bound pronouns. In *Phi theory: Phi-features across modules and interfaces*, 35–56. Oxford University Press.

Heim, Irene, and Angelika Kratzer. 1998. *Semantics in Generative Grammar*, volume 13. Blackwell Oxford.

von Heusinger, Klaus. 2002. Reference and representation of pronouns. *Pronouns-Grammar and Representation* 109–135.

von Heusinger, Klaus. 2007. Alternative semantics for definite NPs. In *On Information Structure, Meaning and Form: Generalizations Across Languages*, 485–508. John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Hinterwimmer, Stefan. 2018. The binding properties of demonstrative pronouns, definite descriptions and full demonstrative dps. *Atypical Demonstratives: Syntax, Semantics and Pragmatics* 568:197.

Jenks, Peter, and Rassidatou Konate. 2022. Indexed definiteness. *Glossa: a journal of general linguistics* 7.

Kratzer, Angelika. 1998. More structural analogies between pronouns and tenses. In *Semantics and Linguistic Theory*, volume 8, 92–110.

Kratzer, Angelika. 2009. Making a pronoun: Fake indexicals as windows into the properties of pronouns. *Linguistic Inquiry* 40:187–237.

Krifka, Manfred, Francis Jeffry Pelletier, Gregory Carlson, Alice ter Meulen, Gennaro Chierchia, and Godehard Link. 1995. Genericity: An introduction. In *The generic book*, ed. by Greg N. Carlson and Francis Jeffry Pelletier, 1–124. University of Chicago Press.

Lasnik, Howard. 1986. On the necessity of Binding Conditions. In *Essays on anaphora. studies in natural language and linguistic theory*, 149–167. Springer.

Lee, Chungmin. 1992. Definite/specific and case marking in Korean. *Theoretical Issues in Korean Linguistics* 325–341.

Lee, Felicia. 2003. Anaphoric R-expressions as bound variables. *Syntax* 6:84–114.

McCready, Elin. 2010. Varieties of conventional implicature. *Semantics and Pragmatics* 3:1–57.

Messick, Troy. 2023. Hybrid agreement with English quantifier partitives. *Glossa: a journal of general linguistics* 8:1–37.

Patel-Grosz, Pritty. 2015. *Epithets at the Syntax-Semantics Interface*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Patel-Grosz, Pritty, and Patrick Grosz. 2010. On the typology of donkeys: Two types of anaphora resolution. In *Proceedings of Sinn und Bedeutung*, volume 14, 339–355.

Postal, Paul. 1966. On so-called 'pronouns' in English. In *Report on the Seventeenth Annual Round Table Meeting on Linguistics and Language Studies*, ed. by F. Dinneen, 177– 206. Georgetown University Press.

Potts, Christopher. 2005. *The Logic of Conventional Implicatures*. Oxford University Press.

Potts, Christopher, Ash Asudeh, Seth Cable, Yurie Hara, Erin McCready, Luis Alonso-Ovalle, Rajesh Bhatt, Christopher Davis, Angelika Kratzer, Tom Roeper, and Martin Walkow. 2009. Expressives and identity conditions. *Linguistic Inquiry* 40:356–366.

Pupa, Francesco. 2022. Determiners are phrases. *Mind & Language* 37:893–913.

Reinhart, Tanya. 1983. Coreference and bound anaphora: A restatement of the anaphora questions. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 6:47–88.

Roberts, Craige. 2014. Indexicality. MS. The Ohio State University.

Roeper, Tom. 2006. Not only I: Notes on the syntax of focus binding. *Studia Grammatica* 63:353–366.

Rooth, Mats. 1992. A theory of focus interpretation. *Natural Language Semantics* 1:75–116.

Rooth, Mats Edward. 1985. Association with focus. Doctoral dissertation, University of Massachusetts Amherst.

Safir, Ken. 2004. *The syntax of anaphora*. Oxford University Press on Demand.

Safir, Ken. 2014. One true anaphor. *Linguistic Inquiry* 45:91–124.

Sauerland, Uli. 2013. Presuppositions and the alternative tier. In *Semantics and linguistic theory*, ed. by Todd Snider, volume 23, 156–173.

Schachter, Paul, and Fe T Otanes. 1972. *Tagalog reference grammar*. Univ of California Press.

Schlenker, Philippe. 2005. Minimize Restrictors! In *Proceedings of Sinn und Bedeutung 9*, ed. by Emar Maier, Corien Bary, and Janneke Huitink, 385–416. Nijmegen Centre of Semantics.

Schlenker, Philippe. 2011. Donkey anaphora: the view from sign language (ASL and LSF). *Linguistics and Philosophy* 34:341–395.

Schwarz, Florian. 2009. Two types of definites in natural language. Doctoral dissertation, University of Massachusetts Amherst.

Schwarzschild, Roger. 1999. GIVENness, AvoidF and other constraints on the placement of accent. *Natural language semantics* 7:141–177.

Simons, Mandy, Judith Tonhauser, David Beaver, and Craige Roberts. 2010. What projects and why. In *Semantics and linguistic theory*, 309–327.

Sudo, Yasutada. 2012. On the semantics of phi features on pronouns. Doctoral dissertation, MIT.

Varaschin, Giuseppe, Peter Culicover, and Susanne Winkler. 2026. In pursuit of Condition C: (non-)coreference in grammar, discourse and processing. In *Information structure and discourse in generative grammar: Mechanisms and processes*, ed. by Andreas Konietzko and Susanne Winkler. De Grutyer.

Varaschin, Giuseppe, and Antonio Machicao Y Priemer. to appear. A structurally uniform account of slur-based definites. In *Proceedings of Sinn und Bedeutung 30*.

Zhang, Ying, and Dorothy Ahn. to appear. The most descriptive depiction. In *Proceedings of Sinn und Bedeutung 30*.

Appendix A: Coming back to the dichotomy

What we have seen so far

Traditional dichotomy of pronouns vs. r-expression in syntax/semantics

- pronouns as variables with ϕ-presuppositions
- r-expressions as lexical items with predicative noun content

Fake nouns and attributive vs. referential dichotomy

- pronouns and r-expressions can both
  - be variables with backgrounded content
  - be attributive with foregrounded content

noun category does not determine distribution or interpretation

Pronouns

We often assume the following primitive noun categories.

anaphors, **pronouns**, **r-expressions**

Pronouns

We often assume the following primitive noun categories.

anaphors, **pronouns**, **r-expressions**

- cross-linguistic picture: pronoun status less clear
- pronouns vary in the kinds of content they carry [Ahn 2019, 2025a]:
  - Pronouns that rely on features [Thai, Kazakh, Hindi]
  - Pronouns that carry noun classes [Bantu]
  - Pronouns that rely on NPs [Korean, Vietnamese]

[use of open class NPs] → [noun classes] → [closed-class features]

‘Pronouns’ of other languages: featural definites

1. Relying on NPs

[Korean, Vietnamese]

(72) a. kyay (ku-ay: that-**kid**)
b. anh ay (**older.brother** DEM) (Beryl Bui, pc)

‘Pronouns’ of other languages: featural definites

1. Relying on NPs

[Korean, Vietnamese]

(72) a. kyay (ku-ay: that-**kid**)
b. anh ay (**older.brother** DEM) (Beryl Bui, pc)

2. Arbitrary noun classes

[Bantu languages]

(73) ɲɛ́ (pron.cl1); yɔ́ (pron.cl9)

	Basaá pron	Tunen pron
1sg	*mɛ̀*	*mìàŋó*
2sg	*wɛ̀*	*àŋó*
1pl	*ɓěs*	*bʷàsú*
2pl	*ɓee*	*bʷànú*
cl. 1	*ɲé*	*wéy*
cl. 2	*ɓɔ́*	*bʷàbú*
cl. 3	*wɔ́*	*múit*
cl. 4	*ŋwɔ́*	*mít*
cl. 5	*jɔ́*	*nét*
cl. 6	*mɔ́*	*mát*
cl. 7	*yɔ́*	*yét*
cl. 8	*gwɔ́*	*bét*
cl. 9	*yɔ́*	*mét*
cl. 10	*yɔ́*	*mít*
cl. 13	*cɔ́*	*túɛ́t*
cl. 14		*búɛ́t*
cl. 19	*hyɔ́*	*hít*

‘Pronouns’ of other languages: featural definites

1. Relying on NPs

[Korean, Vietnamese]

(72) a. kyay (ku-ay: that-**kid**)
b. anh ay (**older.brother** DEM) (Beryl Bui, pc)

2. Arbitrary noun classes

[Bantu languages]

(73) ɲɛ́ (pron.cl1); yɔ́ (pron.cl9)

3. Primitive features

[Thai, (Kazakh, Hindi)]

- Thai: *kăo* (animate) vs. *man* (inanimate)
- Kazakh (Merlin Balihaxi, pc) and Hindi:

(74) a. *ol* (animate); NP for inanimate
b. *vo* (animate); NP for inanimate

	Basaá pron	Tunen pron
1sg	*mɛ̀*	*mìàŋ́*
2sg	*wɛ̀*	*àŋ́*
1pl	*ɓěs*	*bʷə̀sú*
2pl	*ɓee*	*bʷə̀nú*
cl. 1	*ɲé*	*wéy*
cl. 2	*ɓɔ́*	*bʷə̀bú*
cl. 3	*wɔ́*	*múit*
cl. 4	*ŋwɔ́*	*mít*
cl. 5	*jɔ́*	*nét*
cl. 6	*mɔ́*	*mát*
cl. 7	*yɔ́*	*yét*
cl. 8	*gwɔ́*	*bét*
cl. 9	*yɔ́*	*mét*
cl. 10	*yɔ́*	*mít*
cl. 13	*cɔ́*	*túét*
cl. 14		*búét*
cl. 19	*hyɔ́*	*hít*

Pronouns as featural definites

What is a pronoun?

a featural definite that relies on primitive features [Ahn 2025a]

- primitive features: [Harley and Ritter 2002]
  - in phonology: physical properties [±sonorant], etc.
  - in morphology: cognitive properties person/number/gender/animacy
- pronoun: relies on closed-class , conventionalized, primitive features
- definite description: relies on the lexical item NP

Pronouns as featural definites

What is a pronoun?

a featural definite that relies on primitive features [Ahn 2025a]

- primitive features: [Harley and Ritter 2002]
  - in phonology: physical properties [±sonorant], etc.
  - in morphology: cognitive properties person/number/gender/animacy
- pronoun: relies on closed-class , conventionalized, primitive features
- definite description: relies on the lexical item NP

pronouns to r-expressions, a gradience of content

[use of open class NPs] → [noun classes] → [closed-class features]

A different categorization

anaphors, **pronouns**, **r-expressions**

↓

anaphors vs. **everything else**

anaphors:

- *D-bound* ('one true anaphor') [Safir 2014]
  - D-bound: a universally available dependent anaphor that must be A-bound
  - distribution and form fully determined in syntax (feature matching, phase-sensitive spell-out)

everything else:

- pronouns, descriptions, demonstratives, names, epithets
- they all start out as $< e, t >$ predicates
  - They can refer based on content or index
  - If an index is present, content becomes a label

Why so different?

[Q] But why are they so different?

- they carry different <e,t> content
- their content signals different kinds of reference strategy



- pronoun *she*
- description *the woman*
- demonstrative *that linguist*
- name *Dorothy*
- *epithet the weirdo*

Why so different?

[Q] But why are they so different?

→ reduced to differences in content and the pragmatics of using content

1. Informativity and attributive vs. referential tendency
   - Pronouns used referentially much more than attributively
   - Definites readily used attributively
2. Markedness
   - Definites carry more content
   - subject to pragmatic economy [Schlenker 2005]
3. Signal strength
   - Pronouns may signal a referential use
   - *-nim*, *-gata*, *si* marking serve as signals of referential use
     *English: *the Pope* vs. *your highness* [Chris Barker, Anna Szabolcsi, pc]

Attributive demonstratives?

Claim: They are all <e,t>

- with an index, it becomes a label
- without an index, subject to ι, quantifier, etc.

[Q] Can demonstratives be attributive?

Attributive demonstratives?

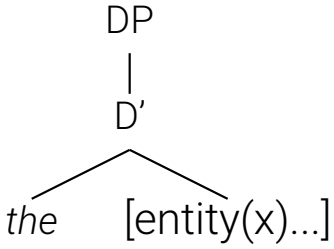
Claim: They are all <e,t>

- with an index, it becomes a label
- without an index, subject to ι, quantifier, etc.

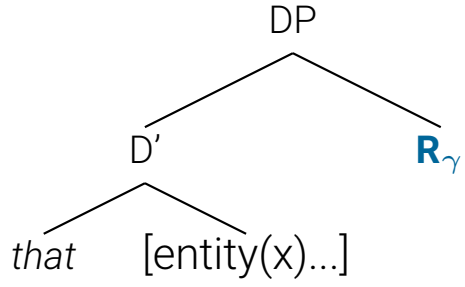
[Q] Can demonstratives be attributive?

[A] Not often! Because it's often carrying an index.

(75) $[\![\text{that}]\!] = \lambda P.\ \lambda R.\ \iota x{:}P(y) \wedge R(y)$ [*R*: *i*, →, RC, gestures] [Ahn 2022, 2025b]



definite
'the maximal entity
that is [restriction]



demonstrative
'the maximal entity
that is [restriction] and **also R_γ**

Attributive demonstratives?

Claim: They are all <e,t>

- with an index, it becomes a label
- without an index, subject to ι, quantifier, etc.

[Q] Can demonstratives be attributive?

[A] But if the additional slot is filled (with something other than *i*)...

Attributive demonstratives [Zhang and Ahn to appear]

(76) That student who scored a 100 on the exam is a genius.

(77) This car$_{[\text{open-up}]}$ is the new kind of sports car, not this car$_{[\text{open-side}]}$.



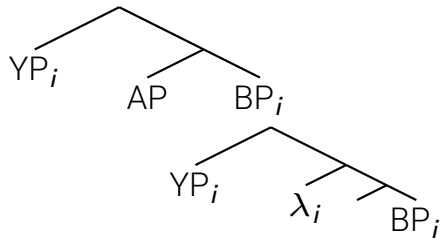


Principle C violations

Binding Theory

Binding Theory: 'restricts the distribution of nouns that have the same referent' [Büring 2005]

- binding can mean many things:
  - coindexation + c-command in syntax
  - operator/quantifier bound in semantics



- Safir 2004: *co-construal* for 'having the same referent' ('any form of identity relation between two nominals')

Co-construal depends on:

1. morphological form of the nouns — reflexives, pronouns, r-expressions
2. structural relations between the nouns — locality, c-command

Binding Principles

Binding Principles syntactic constraints on distribution

Principles A, B, C [Chomsky 1981]

assuming three primitive categories of nouns

A **reflexives** coconstrued with local, c-commanding antecedent

(78) a. That it rained upset {Jin, him, *himself}
b. Min$_i$ likes herself$_{i/*j}$.

B **pronouns** cannot be coconstrued with local c-commanding antecedent

(79) Jin$_i$ likes him$_{*i}$.

C **r-expressions** cannot be coconstrued with any c-commanding antecedent

(80) a. She$_i$ likes Min$_{*i/j}$.
b. Min$_i$ thinks that Min$_{*i/j}$ is smart.

Principle C violations

Principle C

(81) a. Jin$_i$ sees Jin$_{*i}$.
b. Jin$_i$ thinks that Jin$_{*i}$ is smart.

Principle C violations

Principle C

(81) a. Jin$_i$ sees Jin$_{*i}$.
b. Jin$_i$ thinks that Jin$_{*i}$ is smart.

many violations across languages

r-expressions coconstrued with identical c-commanding r-expressions

- Zapotec, Hmong, Vietnamese, Thai, ...

(82) **Nít$_1$** phûut wâa **Nít$_1$** sabaaj
Nit say comp Nit comfortable
'Nit said that she's comfortable.' [Thai; Chaiphet and Jenks 2021; Lasnik 1986]

(83) R-yu'làà**a**'z ra **bxuuhahz** ra **bxuuhahz**
hab-like pl priest pl priest
'The priests like themselves.' [Zapotec; Black 1994; Lee 2003]

Principle C violations

Maybe these are just reference to different guises

(84) Nít$_i$ said Nít$_j$ is comfortable.

a. g(i) = Nít$_A$
b. g(j) = Nít$_B$

Principle C violations

Maybe these are just reference to different guises

(84) Nít$_i$ said Nít$_j$ is comfortable.

a. g(i) = Nít$_A$

b. g(j) = Nít$_B$

No,

- second Nít allows sloppy interpretation [Chaiphet and Jenks 2021; Lee 2003]

(85) Mii khêɛ Nít thîi khít wâa Nít chàlàat.
ext just Nit rel think comp Nit smart
'Only Nit thinks that she's smart.'
(Others don't think they are smart.) [C&J'21:(13)]

→ means only *Nít* has the property of [*y* thinking *y* is smart]
→ suggests that Nít here behaves like a semantically bound variable

Principle C violations

Solutions in the literature

Weaken Principle C.

- Obviative theories of Principle C [Reinhart 1983; Safir 2014]: if you could've used a pronoun for the same interpretation, but you used a name/description, there is an *expectation of disjoint reference*
- aligns with data showing that descriptions can be bound if you control:
  - plausibility, at-issueness [Gor and Syrett 2018]
  - markedness, discourse coherence [Schlenker 2005, Varaschin et al. 2026]

Principle C violations

Solutions in the literature

Save Principle C. pronoun ≠ r-expression

- The idea: they are *NOT* r-expressions in syntax!
  1. they are copies of their antecedents [Lee 2003]
  2. they are features on pronouns [Chaiphet and Jenks 2021]
     a subset of r-exp (titles, names, kinship terms) as 'open-class' person features

(86) she_7: <7,*e*, 3 > [complex indices; Sudo 2012]

(87) a. $Nít_1$: <1, *e*, ***Nit*** >

b. $khruu_4$: <4,*e*, ***teacher*** >

[Q] open-class person features?

Non-identical copies; problematic for Principle C accounts

Prediction: bound expression must be identical or less than antecedent

- copy has to be at most the antecedent
- π features must agree and be identical

non-identical copies

(88) Only *the linguist* called the philosopher for the news article that identified the idiot as a culprit.

(89) wuli kyoswunim-man cip-ey kase wuli taytanhan kyoswunim nonmwun ilkcyo
our prof-only home-DAT go our awesome prof paper read
'Only our professor goes home and reads our awesome professor's paper.'

- Note that non-identical copies of r-expressions can be bound is problematic for early accounts of Principle C violations: copy theory nor complex index story