Fake nouns: On the role of content in reference

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Introduction

Introduction

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: Do they have different roles in enabling/constraining anaphoric relation? How much of that is represented in their semantics?

→ A mixed answer in the literature

This talk: Uniform semantics, subject to same two mechanisms of reference

Main empirical motivation

A novel parallel observed between ϕ of pronouns and NP of descriptions

Fake features [Heim 2008; von Heusinger 2007; Kratzer 2009, a.o.]

(1) Only [Mary$_i$]$_F$ did her$_i$ homework.

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

- ϕ inference is not part of focus alternatives
- considered as a characteristic of ϕ presupposition

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- considered as a characteristic of ϕ presupposition

Fake nouns [Ahn 2024]

(2) Only one student$_i$ complained about the poster dimension provided by the conference not fitting the student$_i$'s printer.

a. Others$_i$ (student or not) didn't complain about ... their$_i$ printer

- How to account for this washed-out behavior of nouns?

Preview

In this use, pronouns and definite descriptions alike:

- only contribute an indexed variable in the (truth-conditional) semantics
  accounts for fake features/noun property
- the content (ϕ or NP) only serve as 'labels'
  labels as bookkeeping device for given entities

Implications

1. Separating the role of index and content in bound expressions
2. Uniform treatment of ϕ, nouns, (and names, ..) as predicative content
3. Difference arises from well-known ambiguity between referential vs. attributive uses of content (that extends to all definite expressions)

Outline

1. Fake nouns (...and modifiers!)

- Identifying them
- Problems

2. Epithets, Indexicals, and Referential Descriptions

- Separation of index and description

3. Accounting for fake nouns/features

- Fake nouns as index + (description as label)

4. Labels

Fake nouns

Fake features of pronouns

Phi-features of pronouns observed to be systematically ignored in certain contexts (leading to terms like ‘fake indexicals/features’) [Kratzer 1998; Heim 2008; Bassi 2021; Sudo 2012, a.o.]

- allows sloppy readings with mismatching ϕ in ellipsis

  (3) I did my homework, but you didn’t [~~do~~ **your** ~~homework~~].[Bassi 2021:(50)]

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- allows sloppy readings with mismatching ϕ in ellipsis

  (3) I did my homework, but you didn't [~~do **your** homework~~]. [Bassi 2021:(50)]

- allows mismatched gender alternatives under focus operators

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

  - also with definite descriptions [von Heusinger 2007]

    (5) Scenario: One German professor attended the party, three Japanese professors, five English professors, and also two office workers.
    Sam only talked to the German$_F$ professor.

Approaches

Some approaches in the literature

1. Weak Projection: ϕ doesn't project to focus values [Sauerland 2013]
2. Minimal pronoun: pronoun does not contain any information about ϕ-features and get them later (through syntactic transmission [Kratzer 1998, a.o.] or valuation from context [Bassi 2021])

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→ 'fake'-ness as a characteristic of ϕ-features

- Sauerland 2013: pure presupposition triggers (that only add presupposition and no assertion) do not project to alternatives
- Bassi 2021: phi-features are not there to begin with, but are morphosyntactically required to be realized as features in the D

Challenge: fake nouns

Observation: bound descriptions also show the same 'fakeness' property

(6) In this old photo, only Mary$_F$ looks like Mary.
= No one else looks like themselves [Roeper 2006]

(7) *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:(22)]

Almost no English data (other than Roeper 2006; Safir 2014)

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→ more productive in languages where descriptions can be bound more readily

Tagalog

Tagalog 2nd person reference

When nouns with proprial article *si/ni* are used as 2nd person reference, the same 'fakeness' is observed [Gérard Avelino, pc]

(8) 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 didn't read their own paper)

- restricted to titles with *si*
- no definite/topic-marking *ang* or names

si-marked nouns allow fakeness in Tagalog.

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 [Ahn 2019]

(9) 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.'

(10) 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]~~'

Bare nouns, titles, names allow fakeness in Korean.

Data are familiar

Similar data have been observed for a while,

- but in the context of (apparent) **Principle C violations**
  (R-expressions being bound by identical R-expressions)
- Zapotec, Hmong, Vietnamese, Thai, ...

(11) John konnuad John.
John shaved John
'John shaved himself.' [Thai; Lasnik and Stowell 1991]

- bound readings allow sloppy interpretation [Chaiphet and Jenks 2021]

(12) Mii khêɛ Nít thîi khít wâa Nít chàlàat.
ext just Nit rel think comp Nit smart
'Only Nit thinks that she's smart.' [C&J'21:(13)]

→ but not discussed in light of 'fakeness'

And more fakeness

Going back to English

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

(13) 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.

And more fakeness

Going back to English

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

(13) 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)
- parallel results with ellipsis for Japanese [David Oshima, Ryo Kobayashi, pc]

(14) 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]~~.'

- fakeness extends beyond nouns (I'll focus on nouns)

Summary of the issue

Expressions with descriptive content (bare nouns, 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: bare nouns in Korean and *si*-nouns in Tagalog are definite descriptions [Lee 1992, Ahn 2019, a.o.; see Dayal 2011]; Roothian focus semantics [Rooth 1992, 1985]

(15) $[_{\alpha}$ 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. $[\![(15)]\!]$ = 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

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

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(17) [$_\alpha$ 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. $[\![(17)]\!]$ = 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

(18) $[_{\alpha}$ 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:

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

(20) *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)]

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   (20) *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]:

   (21) 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]

(22) 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]

(23) 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]

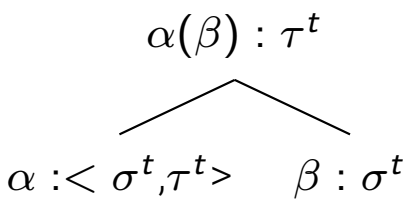
(24) truth-conditional content $[\![\cdot]\!]^t = \{w_1, w_2, ...\}$ S true in w_x iff $w_x \in [\![S]\!]^t$
use-conditional content $[\![\cdot]\!]^u = \{c_1, c_2, ...\}$ S felicitous in c_x iff $c_x \in [\![S]\!]^u$

(25) TC and UC types

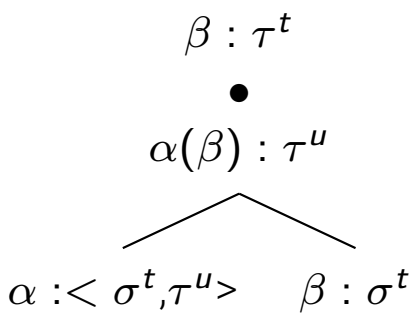
a. e,t are basic TC types.
b. u is a basic UC type.
c. If σ and τ are TC types, then $< \sigma, \tau >$ is a TC type.
d. If τ is a TC type, then $< \tau, u >$ is a UC type.

TC vs. UC domain

Truth-conditional application



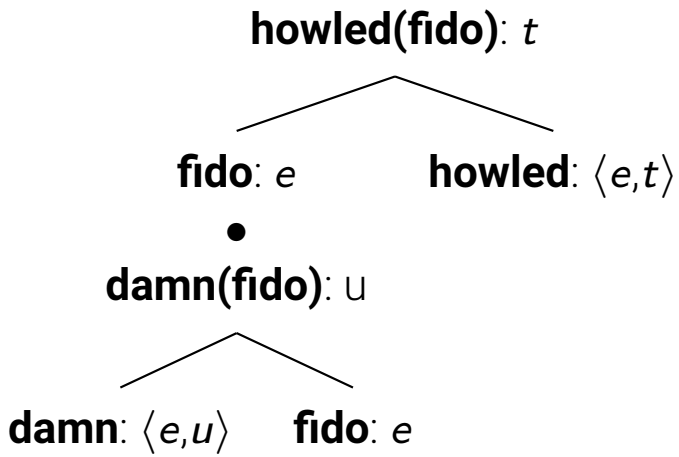
Use-conditional application



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

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

a. ⟦(26)⟧ = <howled(fido), {damn (fido)}>



TC vs. UC domain

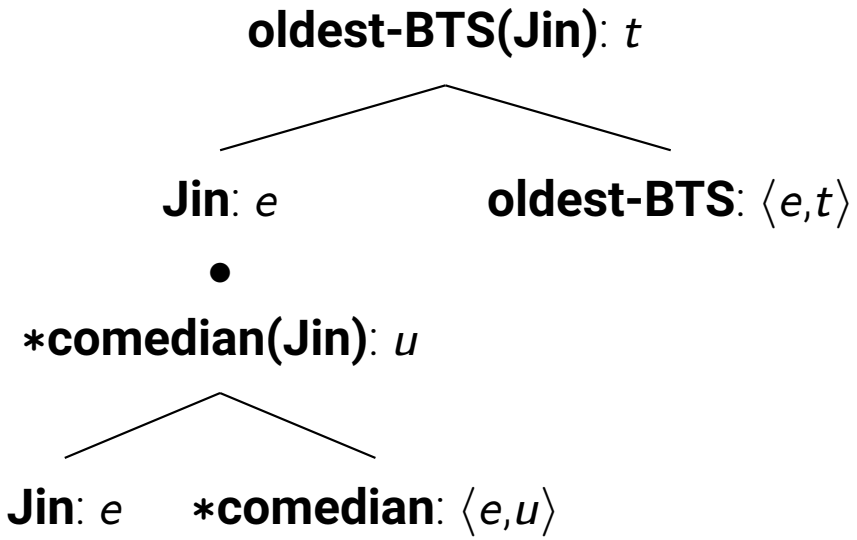
TC <e,t> content can be turned into UC <e,u> content

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

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

(28) Jin, a comedian, is the oldest member of BTS.

a. ⟦(28)⟧ = <oldest-BTS(Jin), {∗comedian(Jin)}>



Expressive content as UC

Epithets as special pronouns with expressive content [Patel-Grosz 2015; Potts 2005; Varaschin and Machicao Y Priemer 2026, a.o.]

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

- 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])

     (30) 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.

     (31) 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)

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

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)

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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

(33) 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)

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.'

(34) 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

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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

(35) (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)) [Ahn 2024; Gutzmann and McCready 2014]

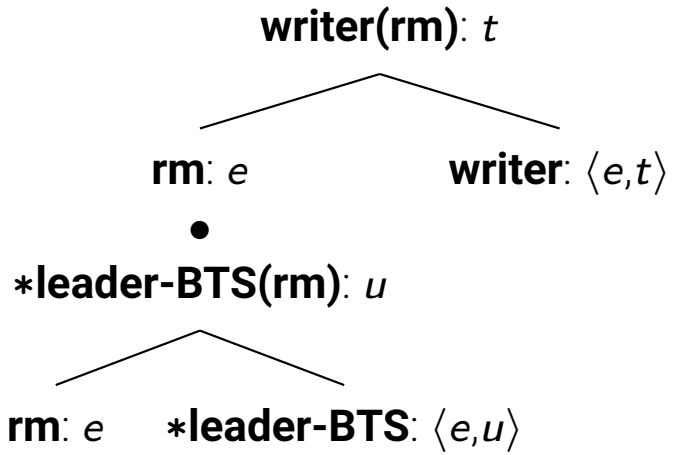
Referential *the* as a pronoun with UC content

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**

(36) ⟦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.**

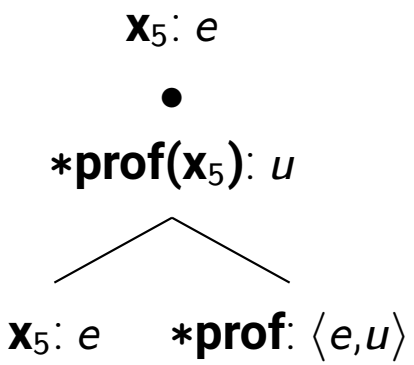
- The presence of indexed pronoun is what backgrounds the content.

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

(37) *professor* = x + *prof



(38) [$_\alpha$ 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. $[\![(38)]\!]$ = <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:

(39) 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:

(40) 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.

(41) 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

(42) 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)

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

A nice consequence: reducing fake features to UC

Fake features subsumed under UC projection behavior.

(44) $[_{\alpha}$ 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. $[\![(44)]\!]$ = <No one else other than 5 did their homework, {*female(5)}>

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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]

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

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

(46) a. $[\![\text{responsible self}_7]\!]^t = x_7$
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Uniform prediction of fakeness

(47) 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)
    - extends to modified *self*/pronoun cases as well ('delicate self', 'resopnsible her')

But is ∗P(x) enough? More on labels..

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

(48)
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?

(49) 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 2026])

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

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(50) (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:

(51) 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

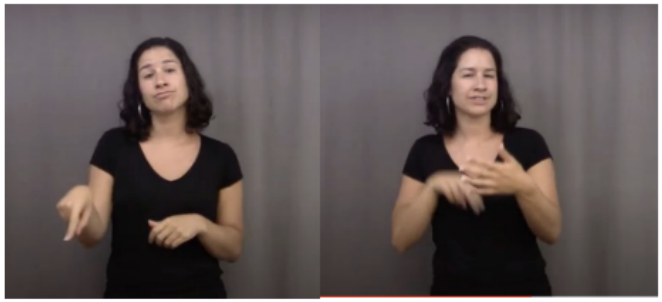
boy IX-LOCUS$_a$ girl IX-LOCUS$_b$ sit class IX-LOCUS$_a$ read
'There's this boy and this girl. They sit in class. That one [the boy] reads.'

[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



(52) 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

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(53) a. $[\![\text{o yeca}]\!]^u$ = {c: rural(x) in c}
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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 I_i in Roberts 2014

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

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

- applies to names and arbitrary labels, too

(56) a. $[\![A]\!]^u$ = {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

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

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

  → in general, attribution of P to x is anchored to sp(c)

Overt RM

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

(58) $[\![\text{Mr}]\!] = \lambda P_{\tau} \lambda w \lambda x : [male(x) \wedge R_{<\tau,et>}(P)(x)]$.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)

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

(60) 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]

(61) (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. New observation: Fake nouns When a noun-containing description is bound, the noun content is ignored in focus alternatives. (also modifiers)

2. Proposal: Nouns as labels in referential uses

- 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 referentially used definite expressions (pronouns, epithet-use of slur definites, names)

3. Labels as involving a speaker-anchored relation

- Labels require some association between x and P, specifically anchored to sp(c)

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?

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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?

Claim: They are all <e,t>

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

[Q] But why are they so different?

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- with an index, it becomes a label
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[Q] But why are they so different?

1. Conventionalization
   - Pronouns used with indices much more than descriptions
2. Markedness
   - Demonstratives carry more restrictions [Elbourne 2008; King 2001; Robinson 2005; Simonenko 2014; Ahn 2022]
   - Principle B and C as expectation of disjoint reference [Reinhart 1983; Safir 2014; Schlenker 2005]
3. Manner implicatures of labels

Why so different?

What is the consequence of using one label over the other?

- Choice of expression as Manner [Grosz et al. 1995]
- Using *damn* over *darning* has pragmatic consequences
- We would expect the same for labels

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→ Deriving anti-uniqueness of demonstratives [Nowak 2019, a.o.]
  - *Kate D* suggests multiple Kates
  - *THAT wall* suggests multiple walls [Saha et al. 2024]
  - *that WALL* suggests one wall [Chen, to appear]

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→ A referential definite does not need uniqueness
  - uniqueness in referential use subsumed under manner-implicatures on labels (don't use *Jin* if there are 3 people named Jin)
  - can be canceled:

(62) If a bishop meets a bishop, the guy blesses the guy.

Attributive demonstratives?

Claim: They are all <e,t>

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[Q] Can demonstratives be attributive?

Attributive demonstratives?

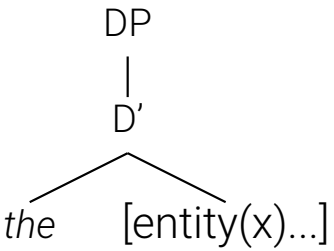
Claim: They are all <e,t>

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

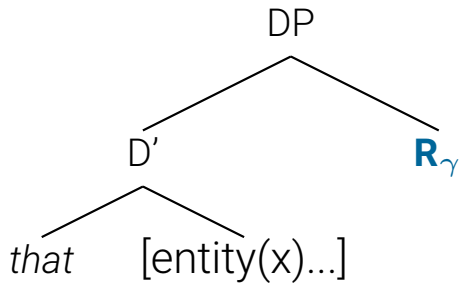
[Q] Can demonstratives be attributive?

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

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



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]

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

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

More on ‘referential’

What makes an expression referential?

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

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

- it’s often difficult to tease apart a unique vs. familiar definite

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

- it’s often difficult to tease apart a unique vs. familiar definite

indexed definites against typicality pressures [Schwarz + 17, in prep]

German, English, Czech, Polish, Korean, Thai, Turkish, Russian, Swedish, Spanish

(67) a. There is a hat. 

b. Click on the$_{W/S}$ hat.  

Coming soon!

Thank you!

'That woman is a woman!' [*Shakespeare in Love*, 1998]

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