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The projection problem of nominal appositives

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Asher (2000) convincingly argues that the content of some nominal appositives (appositive content) projects out of intensional contexts such as conditionals. For example, (1a) does not entail (1b) because the appositive content in (1a) projects out of the antecedent of the conditional. The meaning of (1a) can be paraphrased as (1c). This result is also predicted by most theories of nominal appositives (e.g. Sells 1985, Chierchia & McConnell-Ginet 1990, Dever 2001, del Gobbo 2003, Potts 2003).

- (1) a. If the party, an uninteresting social gathering, is over, then we should find somewhere else to get a drink.
- b. If the party is over and the party is an uninteresting social gathering, then we should find somewhere else to get a drink.
- c. The party is an uninteresting social gathering. If the party is over, then we should find somewhere else to get a drink.

Although the appositive content does project out in some cases, as in examples (1a) and (2a), example (2b) shows that it need not necessarily do so. (2b) can be paraphrased as (2c).

- (2) a. If John, a famous professor, publishes a book, he will make a lot of money.
- b. If a professor, a famous one, publishes a book, he will make a lot of money.
- c. If a professor publishes a book and he is famous, he will make a lot of money.

The failure of the appositive content to project can also be observed in other types of intensional context, like (3a), (3b), and (3c). For the de-re reading of the main clauses in (3a), (3b), and (3c), the appositive content projects out, but the appositive content does not project out in the de-dicto reading of the main clauses in (3a), (3b), and (3c). Interestingly, when the main clause of (3c) is interpreted as de-dicto, the nominal appositive can also receive a generic interpretation -- the generic interpretation is not available for some people.

- (3) a. Mary wants to marry an Italian, a rich one.
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b. John believes that a professor, a quite famous one, published a new book.

c. A wolf, a ferocious animal, might come into your house.

On the other hand, the appositive content must project out if the nominal appositives in (3a) and (3b) are replaced by relative appositives, as in (4a) and (4b). These examples can only be construed with de-re readings. These facts raise a challenge to theories (e.g. Doron 1994 and del Gobbo 2003) which treat nominal appositives as reduced relative appositives.

(4) a. Mary wants to marry an Italian, who is a rich one.

b. John believes that a professor, who is a quite famous one, published a new book.

In sum, the failure (in some contexts) of the appositive content to project and the semantic difference between nominal and relative appositives show that the semantics of nominal appositives is in need of still further investigation.

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