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Contents

1. Heidi Harley and Jeff Punske. *Some PP modifiers of NP block relative readings in superlatives.*
2. Natalia Ivlieva and Yasutada Sudo. *Another problem for alternative-based theories of plurality inferences: the case of mass plurals.*
3. Hideki Kishimoto. *Ergativity of adjectives in Japanese.*
4. Todor Koev. *An 'antiproviso problem' for appositive relative clauses.*
5. Philippe Schlenker. *Gradient and iconic features in ASL.*
6. Luis Vicente. *Morphological case mismatches under sluicing.*



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An ‘antiproviso problem’ for appositive relative clauses

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The semantic content contributed by appositive relative clauses is expected to “project”, i.e. entail commitments for the actual speaker independently of the syntactic environment the appositive occurs in (see e.g. Potts 2005, Koev 2013). In (1), the unaltered appositive content (that Edward is from Minnesota) is attributed to the speaker even though the appositive itself is presumably in the syntactic scope of a possibility modal.

(1) It is possible that Edward, who is from Minnesota, enjoys cold winters.

This example showcases a general and fairly robust pattern of appositive projection past various propositional operators. However, Schlenker (ms) notices that under certain conditions appositive projection can be blocked. In (2), your getting into trouble depends both on me calling the Chair and the Chair calling the Dean, so the appositive is interpreted as conjoined to the antecedent clause and becomes part of the regular truth-conditional content of the sentence.

(2) If tomorrow I call the Chair, who in turn calls the Dean, then you will be in deep trouble. (Schlenker ms, slightly modified)

The central observation of this note is that appositive relative clauses can trigger intermediate, i.e. weaker inferences. (3) below differs from (2) in that the appositive does not contribute to the at-issue content. But (3) also contrasts with (1) since the appositive content projects in a weaker, conditionalized form.

(3) If Jack buys a car, which will probably be a Volvo, his wife will be upset.

At-issue content: If Jack buys a car, his wife will be upset.

Projective inference: If Jack buys a car, it will probably be a Volvo.

I call this the “antiproviso problem” for appositive relative clauses for the following reason. Local satisfaction theories of presupposition (see Karttunen 1974, Heim 1983, Beaver 2001) predict that (4) should trigger the conditionalized presupposition that if Fred hates sonnets, he has a wife. In reality, the stronger, unconditional inference is obtained that Fred has a wife.

(4) If Fred hates sonnets, then his wife does so, too. (Geurts 1999)

Geurts (1999) dubs this the “proviso problem” for presupposition. In (3), we have the opposite problem: on most accounts the appositive content is expected to project in its unaltered form but what we get is a weaker, conditionalized inference.

Interestingly, projective inferences triggered by appositive relative clauses do show some similarities to presuppositions. The sentence in (5) has the logical form of $(\phi \wedge \psi_p) \rightarrow \chi$ (where the subscript marks the semantic presupposition associated with

the second part of the *if*-clause) and presupposes that $\phi \rightarrow p$, i.e. that if the applicant is 64 years old we cannot hire him.

- (5) If the applicant is 64 years old and realizes that we cannot hire him, he won't be disappointed by a rejection letter. (Schlenker 2011)

This projection pattern is similar to the one in (3). This last sentence has the logical form of $(\phi \wedge \underline{\psi}) \rightarrow \chi$ (where the underlined part is the appositive import) and triggers the projective inference that $\phi \rightarrow \psi$. (See also Schlenker ms. 2013 for similar observations.)

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