

snippets

Issue 33 - July 2018

Contents

1. Amir Anvari. *A problem for Maximize Presupposition! (Locally).*
2. Brian Buccola. *A restriction on the distribution of exclusive only.*
3. Patrick D. Elliott. *Collective predication and ellipsis.*
4. Maria Esipova. *QUD-addressing appositives don't have to be clause-final.*
5. Naga Selvanathan. *Dative adjuncts are not interveners in Tamil tough-movement.*
6. Gary Thoms. *Quantifiers and the derivation of fragments.*
7. Erik Zyman. *Super-local Remove in nominal preposing around though.*

QUD-addressing appositives don't have to be clause-final

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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7358/snippet-2018-033-esip>

Koev (2012) claims that only clause-final, but not clause-medial appositive relative clauses can address questions under discussion (QUDs) (in all the examples below A_N is a complete or partial answer to the question Q_N):

- (1) a. A: [Who did you meet at the party] $_{Q_1}$ and [what did they bring] $_{Q_2}$?
B: [I met Paula] $_{A_1}$, [who brought cookies] $_{A_2}$.
b. A: [What did Paula bring] $_{Q_1}$ and [when did she leave the party] $_{Q_2}$?
B: ??[Paula, [who brought cookies] $_{A_1}$, left after midnight] $_{A_2}$.

Koev proposes that appositives can acquire at-issue status if and only if the issue raised by the main clause has been fully resolved. A similar analysis is adopted by AnderBois et al. (2013), who propose that a clause-final appositive can raise an issue on its own, forcing an immediate acceptance of the preceding issue.

I observe that Koev's generalization as is doesn't hold in structured coordinated responses:

- (2) *Context: B just watched a debate between two opponents, after which the audience voted on who was more convincing.*
A: [Who were the opponents] $_{Q_1}$ and [how many votes did they get] $_{Q_2}$?
B: [The opponents were Uma, [who got 100 votes] $_{A_2}$, and Zoe] $_{A_1}$, [who got 80] $_{A_2}$.
(3) *Context: B is a priest and just married a couple.*
A: [Who did you just marry] $_{Q_1}$ and [what were they wearing] $_{Q_2}$?
B: [I married Uma, [who was wearing a white dress] $_{A_2}$, and Zoe] $_{A_1}$, [who was wearing a black tux] $_{A_2}$.

The native speakers of English that I consulted all agreed that in both (2) and (3) B's response is an appropriate and complete response to both A's questions.

However, (2) and (3) contain only one main clause each and can't be treated as instances of full clause coordination with ellipsis in the second clause. In (2) we see both morphosyntactic evidence for that (plural agreement on the copula), as well as semantic evidence, since neither Uma nor Zoe can be described as the opponents individually; it is their mereological sum only that satisfies the description. Similarly, in (3) the theme of the predicate *married* is the sum of Uma and Zoe, not either of them individually. Yet, in both cases the single main clause is interrupted by an appositive partial answer to the second QUD.

Of course, A_1 in both cases could be conceptualized as two separate partial answers to Q_1 . In (2), those answers would be, roughly, of the form 'Uma (/Zoe) is an atom of the sum denoted by *the opponents*', and in (3) they would be, roughly, of the form 'Uma (/Zoe) is an atom of the theme of *married*', but the syntax-semantics mapping would then become quite non-trivial.

To sum up, data such as (2) and (3) urge us to revisit our ideas about when appositives can address QUDs, on the one hand, and encourage us to think about how speakers structure their responses to multiple QUDs, on the other.

References

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