Perspective-shifting with appositives and expressives

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Background   Lakoff (1966), McCawley (1982, 1987, 1989), Huddleston & Pullum (2002), Emonds (1976), Culicover (1992), and Potts (2005) claim that appositive relatives are always speaker-oriented, regardless of syntactic position, and Quang (1971), Cruse (1986), Aoun, Choueiri & Hornstein (2001), and Potts (2005) take a similar position on epithets like *the jerk*. These generalizations are challenged by Wang, Reese & McCready (2005), Karttunen & Zaenen (2005), and Amaral, Roberts & Smith (2007), who present examples in which such content is evaluated from non-speaker perspectives (see also Potts 2005:162, Potts 2007). We are persuaded by this new evidence. The questions we address are (i) how widespread are such non-speaker readings, and (ii) what are their underlying causes?

Hypotheses   We present three experiments that bear directly on the following competing hypotheses about the source of non-speaker readings of appositives and expressives:

i. CONFIGURATIONAL: The source of non-speaker readings of appositives and expressives is semantic binding: their content can be bound by higher operators like attitude predicates, thereby shifting it away from the speaker (Schlenker 2003:98).

ii. CONTEXTUAL: The source of non-speaker-oriented readings of appositives and expressives is the interaction of a variety of pragmatic factors. In general, these interactions favor speaker-orientation, but other orientations are always in principle available, regardless of syntactic configuration (Potts 2007).

1. Corpus work   This study focuses on appositives in attitude contexts. It is intended to inform the question of how widespread non-speaker readings are. We began with 177 million words of novels, newspaper articles, and TV transcripts. With a simple regular expression search, we found 278 examples of appositives syntactically embedded inside the complements to attitude verbs. We went through these examples by hand, developing, where possible, textual arguments for what the intended appositive interpretation was: text-level or embedded. We were able to construct such arguments for 62 of the examples: 5 for embedded, 57 for text-level. Our arguments are presently being evaluated by two independent annotators.

2. Questionnaire-based study on appositives   The materials consisted of an invariant context and a target sentence containing an appositive. The contexts were designed to create a viewpoint distinct from the speaker's. The experiment manipulated a single factor in the target sentence: whether the appositive was embedded under an attitude predicate or not. We found that, in these perspectively-rich contexts, non-speaker interpretations were *preferred*, both when the appositive was embedded inside the complement to an attitude predicate and when it was not. This finding supports the CONTEXTUAL hypothesis (ii), though (i) is an understandable conclusion: we found that embedded appositives are statistically more likely to support a non-speaker orientation.

3. Questionnaire-based study on expressives   This experiment probed how the emotive dimension of epithets is affected by prior context. All the epithets were unembedded, appearing as subjects in a separate sentence after an attitude report. The context was manipulated on a single word to reflect whether the subject of the report had a negative or positive association with the referent of the epithet. We found that unembedded epithets could reflect non-speaker perspectives and that negative contexts in the preceeding attitude reports signficantly increased the likelihood of a non-speaker interpretation. This finding supports the CONTEXTUAL hypothesis (ii), and it also informs the question of which contextual factors are relevant for deciding on the intended perspective for expressives.

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