Null Complement Anaphors as Definite Descriptions

Sentences like *Ron won* and *Tipper is ready* involve Null Complement Anaphors (NCAs). They have an initial paraphrase involving a pronoun: *Ron won it* and *Tipper is ready for it*. This talk pursues the idea, defended in Condoravdi and Gawron 1996, that NCAs have the semantics of definite descriptions, not pronouns or demonstratives. I first argue that this idea disarms an argument in Gauker 2011, that NCAs mandate enrichments to Kaplan's (1989) notion of "context." I then observe that it challenges the proposal that pronouns themselves have the semantics of descriptions. The latter proposal can be maintained, however, if it is plausible to say that NCA descriptions are unlike pronominal descriptions in being complete: they include a restriction, provided by the governing verb. I close with a new puzzle: contrary to a general pattern, a class of NCA verbs represented by *notice* can be anteceded by a clause, but not by a DP denoting a situation.

Condoravdi and Gawron (1996) observe that the NCA of (e.g.) *win*, when in the scope of quantifier, patterns with descriptions and not pronouns: (1a) can mean what (1b) does, with what is won varying by man, but (1c) cannot (cp. Partee 1989). The failure of (1c) shows that a pronoun, to support donkey anaphora, requires an explicit noun phrase antecedent (Heim 1982, Elbourne 2005); (1c) constrasts with (2). But the NCA in (1a), like the descriptions in (1b), can support donkey anaphora without an antecedent of suitable form—it can support what I will call *mule anaphora*, involving a stronger breed of donkey. Condoravdi and Gawron therefore propose that the NCA has the semantics of a description, anchored to the local subject. For them *won* in (1a) means 'won x's bet'. They take the content of the description to be contextually accommodated.

Attractively, this conclusion answers a challenge presented in Gauker 2011. Gauker objects to the dominant view that "incomplete predicates," which includes all predicates with an NCA, are equivalent to a "complete" counterpart with an overt pronoun or demonstrative. He observes that the NCA for *ready* in (3a) does not pattern with the overt pronoun in (3b): (3a) but not (3b) is easily used to describe a situation in which Tipper and Al are ready for different things. Nor do NCAs pattern with demonstratives, since (4a) but not (4b) is contradictory (except on a 'metalinguistic' reading). In response Gauker proposes a substantial enrichment to the Kaplanian *context of interpretation* (Kaplan 1989), and an unusual semantics for ready. But the enrichment is unwarranted, if we assimilate NCAs to descriptions, as suggested. Then *ready* with an NCA means something like 'ready for the task' or perhaps 'ready for x's task'. This description is interpretively more labile than the pronoun in (3) and yet leads to contradiction in (4)—or so I will argue.

Yet this conclusion in turn challenges the compelling idea that pronouns themselves have the semantics of descriptions (Cooper 1979, Heim 1990, Elbourne 2005). If both the NCA in (1a) and *it* in (1c) are like descriptions, why do the two sentences contrast? Why should the NCA-description but not the pronominal-description support mule anaphora? I will first suggest an answer to why NCAs *can* serve as mules, and then come to the question of why pronouns cannot.

The availability of an NCA is lexically specific. In addition, the domain of reference for an NCA is often more limited than that of an overt complement (Fillmore 1971). For example, while one can win either a contest or a prize, *Ron won* can only mean that Ron won some salient contest. These two facts make it plausible to suppose that any selectional limits are expressed as a restriction on the description, so that x *won* means something like 'x won the contest' or perhaps 'x won x's contest'. This will explain the successful mule anaphora in (1a). Likewise if x *is ready* means something like 'x is ready for the task' or 'x is ready for x's task', we explain (3) and (4).

Why then does the pronoun fail in (1c)? We might take the contrast with (1a) and (1c) to show that pronouns are *not* descriptions. Only NCAs are. In that case the traditional idea of why donkey anaphora fails in (1c) would be at the ready: a pronoun requires a salient discourse referent, and only an antecedent noun phrase provides one. But I will suggest one way to maintain the description

theory of pronouns. Suppose we say that a freely available pronoun, unlike a lexically specified NCA, does not have its implicit restriction set by the verb, and remains incomplete. Then the *it* in (1c) just means 'the ϕ', with ϕ anaphoric. Evidently the anaphora fails, despite the *entailment* that anything won is a contest or a prize. We can follow Elbourne (2005) in requiring that the nominal anaphor ϕ have an overt nominal antecedent. In the talk, I weigh the plausibility of these two options.

I close with a new puzzle for any theory of NCAs, which may hit the description theory hardest. (1a) is an instance of a broader fact, established in Hankamer and Sag 1976 and Grimshaw 1979. When an NCA governed by verb V has an overt antecedent, it need not match the form of an overt complement to the V, (5). But there is an unfamiliar exception to this pattern, involving a class of NCA verbs represented by *notice* and *forget*. These can be anteceded by a declarative clause, (6), but *not* by a DP, (7). (The intended antecedents are bolded.) This cannot be explained by implicating ellipsis of a complement clause under identity with the antecedent (Hankamer and Sag 1976, Grimshaw 1979, Depiante 2000). So it seems to require unprecedented restrictions on the semantics of NCAs, perhaps on the *semantic type* of an antecedent. I briefly sketch some possibilities and their shortcomings, opening the topic for speculation.

Examples

(1) a. Every man who put two chips on 17 won.
b. Every man who put two chips on 17 won the bet / his bet.
c. # Every man who put two chips on 17 won it. (intended: $[\![it]\!]$=the bet)

(2) Every man who placed a bet on 17 won it.

(3) a. Tipper is ready and Al is ready.
b. Tipper is ready for it and Al is ready for it.

(4) a. ⊥ Tipper is ready and Tipper is not ready.
b. Tipper is ready for this and Tipper is not ready for that.

(5) a. Mo stole a book, and I don't approve (*that Mo stole a book).
b. Ro wants to know the name of the suspect, but Syl doesn't care (*the name).

(6) a. Did you know **that the Earth is spherical**? – Yes, I noticed.
b. Every man who knows **that the Earth is spherical** hopes that his kids won't notice/forget.

(7) a. Were you aware of **the sphericality of the Earth**? – Yes I noticed ??(that).
b. Every man who is aware of **the Earth's sphericality** hopes that his kids won't notice/forget ?*(it).
c. **Nothing** was forgotten by the person who had first noticed ?*(it).

References

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