

## Assertions as names, facts as definite descriptions and propositions as indefinites

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## Outline

- ① Background
- ② Nominal denotations
- ③ Their clausal equivalents
- ④ Implications of the proposal
- ⑤ Conclusions and future outlook

# 1. Background

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## Clausal/nominal parallels

- Fruitful strategy in Generative Grammar:  
Syntax of clauses > syntax of nominalisations
- Focus largely on **nominalisations** (cf. Chomsky 1970, Abney 1987, Grimshaw 1990, Szabolcsi 1992, Alexiadou 2001, 2010a, b *amongst many others*)
- **John refused to leave** vs. **John's refusal to leave**
- Approach taken here:  
Semantics/syntax of DPs > semantics/syntax of clauses
- Focus on **names**, **definite descriptions** and **indefinites** and their purported clausal correlates: **assertions**, **facts** and **propositions**.

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# Core proposals

- There are broad **semantic parallels** between the denotations of nominals and clauses:
  - Names/assertions of truth involve **extensional** reference
  - Definite descriptions/factive clauses carry a **presupposition** of existence/truth
  - Indefinites/open propositions are **intensional**
- These semantic parallels are reinforced by **syntactic parallels** in many European languages:
  - V2 = N-to-D movement
  - Obligatory C = obligatory D
  - Empty C = empty D (limited to governed positions)
- Very intricate and subtle explanations arise from the fact that the same information can be conveyed using different referential strategies...

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## 2. Nominal denotations

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# Nominal denotations

- Three basic denotational strategies in the nominal domain (Sheehan & Hinzen 2011, building on Longobardi 1994, 2005, 2008):
  - i. Rigid reference to **individuals** (Barack Obama, *men*);
  - ii. **Variable** reference (the US president, him);
  - iii. **Quantification** (*men*, a man, everyone, someone).

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## (i) Rigid reference to individuals

- *John, Paris, water, fine wine*
- Kripke (1980) - proper names refer rigidly, definite descriptions do not:
  - (1) a. If [Barack Obama] were a woman...
    - b. If [the president of the USA] were a woman...
  - (2) a. Barack Obama is the President of the USA. (informative)
    - b. Barack Obama is Barack Obama. (truism)

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# The syntax of rigidity

- English requires D to remain empty for a rigid reading:

## (3) English (covert N-to-D chain)

- a) #<sub>[DP]</sub> **The** old <sub>[NP]</sub> John ]] (expletive-associate chain)
- b) \*<sub>[DP]</sub> **John** old <sub>[NP]</sub> t<sub>John</sub> ]] ... (overt movement)
- c) <sub>[DP]</sub> **D** old <sub>[NP]</sub> John ]] (covert movement)

- Italian varieties require D to be filled to yield rigid reference:

## (4) Italian varieties (overt N-to-D chain)

- a) <sub>[DP]</sub> **Il** mio <sub>[NP]</sub> Gianni ]]... (expletive-associate chain)  
the my Gianni
- b) <sub>[DP]</sub> **Gianni** mio <sub>[NP]</sub> t<sub>Gianni</sub> ]]... (overt movement)
- c) \*<sub>[DP]</sub> **D** mio <sub>[NP]</sub> Gianni ]]... (covert movement)

- Opposite parameter settings: D must be empty/filled at PF.  
[Longobardi (1994, et seq.)]

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# Kind reference

- Kind reference also involves rigid reference (Kripke/Putnam).
- Again Italian requires an overt chain here and English a covert one (with plural/mass kinds):

(5) a. \*Amo <sub>[DP]</sub> **D** <sub>[NP]</sub> buon vino]]. (covert chain)  
Love.1SG good wine

b. Amo <sub>[DP]</sub> **il** <sub>[NP]</sub> buon vino]]. (overt chain)  
Love.1SG the good wine

[Italian, adapted from Longobardi (1994: 631)]

(6) a. I love <sub>[DP]</sub> **D** <sub>[NP]</sub> good wine]]. (covert chain)

b. #I love <sub>[DP]</sub> **the** <sub>[NP]</sub> good wine]]. (overt chain)

- Italian = **obligatory article**, English = **no article possible**

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# Covert N-to-D movement

- **Longobardi's proposal:** Rigidity requires N-to-D dependency but languages differ as to whether this is covert/overt.
- a. *Overt chain*                     $[_{DP} \mathbf{N}_i + D [_{NP} \mathbf{N}_i]]$  or  $[_{DP} \mathbf{D}_i [_{NP} \mathbf{N}_i]]$   
Italian, Spanish, Romanian, Greek, Bulgarian, Arabic.
- b. *Covert chain*                     $[_{DP} \mathbf{N}_i + D [_{NP} \mathbf{N}_i]]$   
English, Norwegian, Icelandic, Welsh (Longobardi 2008: 8)
- **Predicted to be impossible:**, a language *without* N-to-D movement but *with* optional Ds:
  - (THE) OLD JOHN
  - (THE) GOOD WINE

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## (ii) Variable reference

- *The King of France, the President of the USA*
- **Not rigid in reference**
- Also distinct from quantificational DPs (contra Russell 1905 and in line with Strawson 1950, Donnellan 1970, Heim 1988, Elbourne 2008, Mukherji 2010).
- Elbourne (2008) – **no weak crossover**
  - (7) a. His<sub>i</sub> mother loves [the man that Mary's dating/him/John]<sub>i</sub>.
  - b. \*His<sub>i</sub> mother loves [one and only one man that Mary has dated]<sub>i</sub>.
- **Presupposition** of existence, not assertion (Strawson 1950, though philosophers disagree):
  - (8) \*/#The King of France is bald.
  - (9) #John doesn't know/knows the man in the corner. (in an empty room)

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# The syntax of definite descriptions

- In languages with definite Ds, they are **obligatory** when these DPs serve as arguments (though many languages of course lack overt definite Ds):

[<sub>DP</sub> \*(the) [<sub>NP</sub> King of France]]

[<sub>DP</sub> \*(il) [<sub>NP</sub> Re di Francia]]

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## Quantification

- (some) men, (some) uranium, everyone, someone, a man*

Longobardi (1994, 2005) on quantificational DPs:

(10) a. Dx. [NP(x)]

b. [<sub>DP</sub> every [<sub>NP</sub> man]] →  $\forall x$ . [man(x)]

In many Romance/Germanic varieties mass/plural indefinites permit **article omission**:

(11) I have found (some) uranium here.

(12) Gianni ha trovato [<sub>DP</sub> D [<sub>NP</sub> uranio]] in questa miniera  
Gianni has found uranium in this mine  
'Gianni has found (some) uranium in this mine.'

[Italian, Longobardi (2008: 7)]

Where D is empty, it is interpreted as an **existential quantifier**:

(13) [<sub>DP</sub> D [<sub>NP</sub> uranium ]] →  $\exists x$ . [uranium (x)]

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# Two kinds of 'bare NPs'

- English kinds  $[\text{DP } \text{water} + \text{D } [\text{NP } \text{water} ]]$
- D is **filled** so these DPs can be subjects/objects.

(14) Water is a precious resource (kind reading)

- Italian existentials  $[\text{DP } \text{D } [\text{NP } \text{acqua}]]$
- D is **empty** category so limited to 'governed' positions

(15) \*Acqua viene giù dalle colline.  
water comes down from the hills

(16) Viene giù acqua dalle colline.  
comes down water from the hills

(17) Ho preso acqua dalla sorgente.  
I took water from the spring

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## Summary

Syntax of reference (with PF parameterisation) (cf. Sheehan & Hinzen 2011):

Names/kinds	$[\text{DP } \text{N} + \text{D } [\text{NP } \text{N}]]$	D-prominent
Definite descriptions	$[\text{DP } \text{D } [\text{NP } \text{N}]]$	balanced
Indefinites	$[\text{DP } \text{D } [\text{NP } \text{N}]]$	N-prominent

	English	Italian	distribution
Rigid reference	<b>Covert N-to-D</b> *(the) uranium	<b>Overt N-to-D</b> *(l') uranio	unrestricted
Variable reference	<b>D overt</b> *(the) uranium	<b>D overt</b> *(l') uranio	unrestricted
quantification	<b>D optional</b> (some) uranium	<b>D optional</b> (dello) uranio	<b>restricted</b> in Italian

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# 3. Their clausal equivalents

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## (i) Assertions = names/kinds

- Only matrix assertions are **extensional** in that they refer to truth values (Hinzen 2007).
- Again in European languages, there appear to be two distinct patterns in matrix assertions:
- C must be **obligatorily empty** (English, most of Romance):  
(18) (\*that) it is still raining.
- C must be **obligatorily filled** (V2/verb-initial languages):  
(19) [<sub>CP</sub> Det regnar [<sub>TP</sub> ännu]]. [Swedish]  
It rains still
- **Predicted to be impossible:** a language in which C is **optionally filled** in assertions:
- (THAT) IT IS RAINING.

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## (ii) Facts = definite descriptions

- Factive CPs are **presupposed** to be true (cf. Kiparsky and Kiparsky 1970)

(20) a. #John cares [that the world is flat].

b. He thinks/supposes/expects/says that it's raining, but it's not.

c. #He regrets/resents/is glad that it's raining, but it's not.

- As with definite descriptions, this presupposition is **not cancelled under negation**:

(21) He doesn't realize that it's raining, #and it's not

- As with definite DPs, **C must be overt** in English in (verbal emotive) factive contexts:

(22) John doesn't mind/care/regret \*(that) it's raining today.

[cf. also Melvold (1991), Haegeman and Ürögdi (2010) who link factivity to definiteness]

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## (iii) Propositions = indefinites

- Both propositions and bare indefinites are *intensional*:

(23) a. I am searching for [unicorns].

b. I believe [that the world is flat].

- Truth/existence is left open.

- If headed by a null D/C, they are **restricted to 'governed' positions** (cf. Kayne 1981, Stowell 1981, Bošković & Lasnik 2003):

(24) a. I cannot believe [(that) you would say such a thing]!

b. [\*(that) you would say such a thing] I cannot believe!

(25) \*Acqua viene giù dalle colline.  
water comes down from.the hills

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## 4. Implications of the proposal

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### Some further implications

- The tripartite distinction can shed new light on some previously ill-understood phenomena:
  - i. Embedded V2
  - ii. Slifting
  - iii. Insubordination
  - iv. Semi-factivity

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# Embedded V2 (i)

Danish, Norwegian, Swedish and German permit V2 in restricted embedded contexts (cf. Vikner 1995, Biberauer 2002, Heycock 2006, Bentzen et al. 2007, Wiklund et al. 2009, Julien 2010, Bentzen 2010, Holmberg 2010):

(26) a. Han sa/innså at [ i universitetstida hadde han  
he said/realized that in university-time.the had he  
vært veldig ambisiøs].  
been very ambitious

‘He said/discovered that in his university days he had been very ambitious.’

b. \*Han angret på/ benektet at [ i universitetstida hadde  
he regretted on/denied that in university-time.the had  
han vært veldig ambisiøs].  
he been very ambitious

[Norwegian, Bentzen 2010: 169]

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# Embedded V2 (ii)

- Hooper and Thompson’s (1973) verb classes

CLASS A – **strongly assertive** (say, claim, assert, report, vow)

CLASS B – **weakly assertive** (think, believe, suppose, guess, imagine)

CLASS C – **non-assertive** (doubt, deny, be possible)

CLASS D – **factive** (regret, resent, be surprised)

CLASS E – **semi-factive** (know, discover, find out, forget)

- Classes C and D disallow embedded V2 (and other ‘root phenomena’ Emonds 1970).
- Classes C and D form a class only in negative terms [-assertive] (following Hooper and Thompson 1973 and contra McCloskey 2006, Haegeman 2006, Basse 2008, de Cuba 2007, de Cuba & Ürögdi 2010, Haegeman and Ürögdi 2010)

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# Embedded V2 (iii)

- Except for languages with generalised embedded V2 (e.g. Icelandic/Yiddish), V2 occurs in those matrix and embedded contexts which are asserted.
- Why is embedded V2 generally optional?
- Classes A, B, E and F permit more than one kind of clausal complement.

## Distribution of assertions, facts and propositions

		fact	proposition
assertion	Cognitive (weakly assertive)	Class E – cognitive semi-factives ( <i>know, discover, find out, forget, realise, grasp, see</i> )	Class B non-factive cognitive predicates ( <i>think, believe, suppose, guess, imagine, prove, decide</i> )
	Communication (strongly assertive)	Class F- communication factives ( <i>disclose, divulge, confess, point out, reveal</i> )	Class A – non-factive communication predicates ( <i>say, claim, assert, report, vow</i> )
Non-assertive		Class D – emotive factives ( <i>regret, deplore, resent, detest, hate, be glad, be surprised, be aware</i> )	Class C – non-assertive predicates ( <i>doubt, (deny), be possible, be likely, avoid, desire, want</i> )

# Slifting (i)

- Two kinds of ‘bare TPs’:
  - covert T-to-C chain > assertion
  - empty C > proposition
- Where covert T-to-C movement has taken place the CP will not be limited to ‘governed’ positions.
- Slifting targets assertive clauses only (Ross 1973, Hooper & Thompson 1973):

(27) The class is cancelled, he said/affirmed/revealed/I  
assume/believe/discovered.

(28) \*The class is cancelled, he regrets/resents/doubts/  
denies/it’s possible/it’s likely.

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# Slifting (ii)

- Grimshaw (2010): slifted CPs behave both as main clauses and as arguments.
  - There is selection between the ‘matrix’ verb and the slifted clause:
- (29) What will he buy, I wonder/\*I realised.
- **Proposal:** they are arguments which can move to an ungoverned position.

(30) [The class is cancelled]<sub>i</sub>, he said t<sub>i</sub>

- (30) is permitted because the C position is covertly filled.
- [Problem: negative concord ‘It wasn’t him, I don’t think’]

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# Slifting (iii)

- A challenge for a semantic approach: variation across languages.
- Dutch seems to lack embedded V2 (Vikner 1994:66, fn 3)
- But, in slifting contexts, Dutch requires V2:

(31) Het regent                    nog steeds,            lijkt het/denk ik  
it rained    still ever                    seems it/think I  
'It's still raining, it seems/I think.'

(32) \*Dat het nog steeds regent, lijkt het/denk ik'  
that it    still ever    rains,    seems it/think I

- In other embedded contexts there is always an alternative (fact/proposition), in slifting contexts assertion is forced.

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# Insubordination (i)

- Clauses introduced by C appear to function as matrix clauses in restricted contexts (Evans 2007, Noonan 2007, Kempchinsky 2009)
- *Polar exclamatives* (English, French, Swedish, Hungarian)

(33) That I should have to witness such a thing!

(34) Que Jean    soit            malade de la tuberculose    en 2003!  
C    Jean    be.SUBJ ill                    of the tuberculosis                    in 2003  
'For Jean to be sick with tuberculosis in 2003!'  
[French, Schlenker (2005: 10)]

- *Hortatives* (Spanish, Catalan, Romanian, Basque, English *if-hortatives*)

(35) Que                    et                    portis                    bé  
C                    2SG                    behave.SUBJ                    well  
'Behave yourself'                    [Catalan, Kenesi & Ortiz de Urbina (1994: 7)]

- **C is obligatory** in such examples and they are **not assertive**: exclamatives = factive (Abels 2010).

- Most matrix clauses are assertive but factives and indefinites can also function as matrix clauses.

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# Insubordination (ii)

- Also possible in V2 languages (Truckenbrodt 2006: 268-9) in non-assertive contexts:

- *Polar exclamative*

(36) Dass du ( ja) das Fenster öffnest!  
that you (PRT) the window open  
'(Don't forget to) open the window!'

- ???

(37) Dass ich noch einmal Venedig sehen könnte!  
that I still once Venice see could  
'I would like to see Venice once more.'

(38) If only I could see Venice one more time

- **Expected to be possible:** expletive C in a V2 system (cf. Welsh?)

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# Spanish/Romanian optional Cs

- More problematic examples:

(39) Oye, que el Barça ha Ganado el Champions  
listen, that the Barça has won the Champions

[Spanish, Etxepare (2010: 604)]

(40) Hai /lasa ca vine la ora 5.  
Interjection C comes the hour 5.

'Look, he's coming at 5 o'clock.' [Romanian, Hill (2007: 83)]

- These seem to be assertions and yet 'que' is optional here.
- Difficult to pinpoint what the semantic function of 'que' is but it has special evidential role.

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# Semi-factives

- Emotive factives (class D) only select factive complements whereas factive classes E and F select either a factive complement or an assertion.
- They class E and F allow for complements with a covert C:

(41) I know/I've discovered/revealed (that) it is raining.

- In many contexts the meaning of the two kinds of complement will be very close: *to discover a fact = to discover a truth*
- But assertions get cancelled unlike presuppositions:

(42) If I discover that the world is flat...

- This accounts for Karttunen's (1971) semi-factivity.

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# Distribution of assertions, facts and propositions

		(semi)-factive	indefinite
Assertive	Cognitive (weakly assertive)	Class E – cognitive semi-factives ( <i>know, discover, find out, forget, realise, grasp, see</i> )	Class B non-factive cognitive predicates ( <i>think, believe, suppose, guess, imagine, prove, decide</i> )
	Communication (strongly assertive)	Class F- communication factives ( <i>disclose, divulge, confess, point out, reveal</i> )	Class A – non-factive communication predicates ( <i>say, claim, assert, report, vow</i> )
Non-assertive		Class D –emotive factives ( <i>regret, deplore, resent, detest, hate, be glad, be surprised, be aware</i> )	Class C – non-assertive predicates ( <i>doubt, (deny), be possible, be likely, avoid, desire, want</i> )

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# Summary

- If assertions require overt/covert V-to-C movement, then V2/lack of C in matrix assertions follows naturally (cf. Koster 2003).
- If some matrix predicates can take more than one kind of complement, then complex effects such as C-deletion and semi-factivity find a principled explanation.
- Factive/indefinite clauses can function as matrix clauses (insubordination) just as assertions can be embedded in appropriate contexts (embedded root phenomena).
- **Remaining issues:** generalised embedded V2 in Icelandic/Yiddish, more restricted C-deletion in Italian/Spanish, Spanish/Romanian matrix complementisers

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# Conclusion

- There are plausibly **close parallels in the syntax/semantics of clauses and nominals**.
- This suggests a **close syntax-semantics connection**.
- Differences between languages can be attributed both to **arbitrary parametric differences** (covert/overt chains), but also to **different usage preferences** (Dutch doesn't like to embed assertions).

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