

A Uniform Semantics for Genitives and Bridging

We present a uniform account for two linguistic phenomena, namely definite bridging anaphora, and prenominal genitives in English. We define here bridging phenomena as those uses of definite descriptions that refer to an object only indirectly introduced into the common ground as a result of mentioning a related object or event (see Example (1)). Prenominal genitives are *possessive phrases* (Barker, 1995) where the possessor phrase (either a possessive pronoun or a common/proper noun followed by the morphological marker 's) precedes the possessee phrase (the head noun). See Examples (2) and (3).

It has been argued (Nissim, 2001) that the acknowledged underspecified character of the genitive (Williams (1982); Langacker (1995); Postma (1997), among others) is proper of bridging descriptions too: both indicate that a relation R between (two) entities holds, but the interpretation of R itself is left to lexical, pragmatic, or world knowledge based clues, subject to different levels of constraints (Barker, 1995). As for the interpretation process, bridging definites and prenominal genitives have received a similar treatment in different studies, but no explicit reference to a possible matching has been made. For example, both Jensen and Vikner (1994) and Bos et al. (1995) independently make use of Pustejovsky's (1995) *lexical coercion* for obtaining correct interpretations of prenominal genitives and bridging definites, respectively.

Our proposal bears on Chierchia's (1995) account for definite descriptions, which is given in (4), and makes also use of Jensen and Vikner's (1994) notation for genitives and of features pertaining to the information structure domain.

In (4), N is the semantics of the noun introduced by the definite description, y is an entity already given in the discourse model, and R is a relation holding between the referent of y and that of x . So, according to Chierchia, a definite description introduces some unique (the uniqueness is given by ι) individual x that is somehow related (R) to an already introduced entity y . As for Jensen and Vikner's (1994) proposal, genitive expressions they consider are of the kind of (5a), with the respective notation in (5b), generalised in (5c).

If we take the expression in (5c), and we assume the definite article can be represented as a means for marking the *uniqueness* of the referent (car), we obtain the semantic representation in (6). The notation for the two phenomena is now the same (compare (4) and (6)).

As suggested by both Jensen and Vikner (1994) and Bos et al. (1995) (see also Barker (1995); Partee (1997)), the semantics of the head noun itself (N) is taken as the first constraint in the interpretation of R , so that despite the broadness of our account, we can still deal with phrases as (7).

However, we also show that the use of prenominal genitives and bridging definites is sensitive to *givenness*. We then provide a refinement of our account to include information structure, and, consequently, an extension to cover possessive phrases introduced by the possessive determiner ("its" in particular; see Example (3)), that turn out to be the real counterpart of bridging definites, since they are both used when the antecedent is already in focus.

Eventually, we obtain one notation for the definite article in bridging cases and for the possessive determiner, and one for the genitive marker; they are shown in (8) and (9), respectively, where $(+|-)\phi$ indicates whether the antecedent y is in focus or not.

This approach is also supported by results of a corpus analysis that has been performed on the British National Corpus (BNC, <http://www.info.ox.ac.uk/bnc>, over 100 million words) in order to detect lexical restrictions on the distribution of "its" and "the".

- (1) I was driving *my car* when *the engine* broke down.
- (2) *The car's engine* broke down
- (3) I was driving *my car* when *its engine* broke down.
- (4) $\iota x(N(x) \wedge R(x, y))$
- (5) a. Anna's car
 b. the($x(\text{car}(x) \wedge \text{owned_by}(x, \text{Anna}'))$)
 c. the($x(N(X) \wedge R(x, y))$)
- (6) $\iota x(N(x) \wedge R(x, y))$
- (7) John's brother
- (8) $\iota x(N(x) \wedge R(x, y_{+\phi}))$
- (9) $\iota x(N(x) \wedge R(x, y_{-\phi}))$

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