

Simplest Merge, Grafting, and the syntax-semantics of TFRs

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There have been two broad types of approach to **Transparent Free Relatives** (TFRs), which differ radically in their syntactic and semantic assumptions, and which I will call **H** and **A** for convenience (from the initials of the first names of their most prominent proponents: Henk van Riemsdijk and Alex Grosu). The goal of this talk is to outline the strengths and weaknesses of each approach and to leave it to the audience to vote for one of them, or against both.

TFRs may be homophonous with FRs that have the schematic form in [1], with context (potentially) providing disambiguation for data like (2).

[1] ... what_i ... (Intensional Operator) ... [_{IP/sc} t_i (BE) **XP** ...] ...

[2] I bumped into [what Mary thought was Fido].

An FR context: There is a particular dog of which Mary, who died 3 years prior to the event, held the erroneous belief that it was Fido, and the speaker bumped into that dog.

A TFR context: The speaker bumped into something, and Mary, who was nearby and was somewhat short-sighted, thought it was Fido. The speaker need have no settled belief about what (s)he bumped into (either at the event time or at the speech time); note the felicity of all the continuations in (3).

[3] a. ... I am not sure what it in fact was.

b. ... but it later turned out to have been in fact Minnie.

c. ... and it later turned out she had guessed correctly, it was indeed Fido.

Syntactically, H assumes that **XP** in (1) is grafted from the relative unto the matrix, where it is syntactically active, and where – crucially! – it is *interpreted and pronounced*. Syntactically, this approach successfully accounts for the fact that **XP** matches the FR wrt certain properties, e.g., category and syntactic number, but makes incorrect predictions concerning **XP**'s transparency/opacity to extraction and the presence/absence of Case-matching effects. **Detailed data will be provided at the talk.** – The multi-dimensional configuration resulting from grafting is motivated by the fact that **XP** is sometimes *string-wise medial* in the TFR (it was critiqued in Chomsky et al. 2017 on conceptual grounds, specifically, for straying from 'Simplest Merge').

Semantically, H views the remainder of the TFR as a parenthetical modifier of **XP** having 'hedging' import. It will be shown by means of detailed illustration that neither the predicate within **XP** nor **XP**'s determiner/quantifier are interpreted in the matrix, and it will be argued that the view at issue has no plausible semantic analysis of TFRs.

Syntactically, A assumes that TFRs have *the exact configurational properties of FRs* (for concreteness, it assumes that in an FR, CP is a complement of a null Det, but alternative structures may be assumed). This assumption straightforwardly accounts for transparency/opacity to extraction and for the presence/absence of Case-matching effects, but requires a special assumption for the properties that H successfully predicts: *what* is less inherently specified in TFRs than in other environments, giving rise to a 'transparent transmission channel' through which (some of the) features of **XP** can reach the top of the TFR, and conversely. – It will also be argued that the Dutch example in (4), which H viewed as providing particularly strong support for his analysis, in fact favors neither approach if comparable German data are taken into account.

- (4) Bill ontdekte [een wat_k ik zou noemen t_k **eenvoudig-e**] oplossing.
 Bill discovered a what I would call simple-Agr solution
 ‘Bill discovered a ?[new and] what I would call simple solution.’

Semantically, A views the *raison d'être* of TFRs to be the introduction of two potentially distinct guises/counterparts of something, which exist at distinct sets of indices (i.e., worlds, times, etc.), specifically, those of the matrix and those of the relative (the latter set being defined by an explicit or implicit Intensional Operator; see (1)). The internal guise is characterized by **XP**, and the external one, by the TFR. The denotatum of the TFR is invariably indefinite at the intuitive level, and is not characterized within the TFR, the only specification concerning its nature coming from the context (e.g., in (2), the speaker can only have bumped into a concrete entity).

This view will be translated into a detailed formal analysis, with translations for the various examples and with an illustrative full compositional derivation for a specific example. I confine myself in this abstract to noting that the principal formal difference between (2) *qua* FR and *qua* TFR is that in the former case, the trace of *what* is a variable over individuals, of type *e*, and in the latter, a variable over individual concepts (ICs), of type $\langle s, e \rangle$, in particular, over ICs whose values are counterparts of each other at all the indices at which they are defined. I also note that for a whole range of data, in particular, for data like (2), the view that CP denotes a singleton in FRs (Jacobson 1995, Grosu & Landman 1998) may be extended to TFRs, the intuitive indefiniteness of a TFR resulting from the fact that the value of the unique IC it denotes may vary across the worlds of evaluation.

Time permitting, it will be shown that this approach can be successfully extended to additional varieties of FRs, in particular, to data like the following:

- (5) Alex bumped into [what he thought wasn't {a dog, Fido}].
 (6) Bill is yelling at [what **IS** {a dog, Fido}] (no matter what you might think).
 (7) Mary spoke with [what she thought were/was {all, most} parliament members] (but she was in fact addressing only a tiny minority of them).
 (8) This house is [what Bill *would/might* consider beautiful].

References

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