

Unspecific indefinites and (non-)restrictive relative clauses

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Abstract

The semantic investigation of relative clauses with indefinite heads is comparatively scarce in the linguistic literature. This paper discusses the attachment of relative clauses to unspecific indefinites, focusing on appositive modification. We have arranged the paper in four sections: (i) we examine German and English relative clauses that appear in these surroundings, seizing Sells' observation on the close connection between appositive relativization and the discourse phenomenon of quantificational subordination (Sells, 1985) and expanding this idea to modal subordination (Roberts, 1989); (ii) we discuss the consequences of such data on the classical dichotomy of appositive and restrictive relative clauses and update the common diagnostics used for the differentiation of the two types of relative clauses; (iii) we will provide new and controversial data in German that gives rise to a reading we classify as "hybrid", since it satisfies diagnostics of both restrictive and appositive relative clauses; (iv) finally, we will complete the picture by the discussion of an additional type of generic appositives which also attaches to unspecific antecedents.

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1. Introduction

This paper investigates a set of new data from German involving modalized relative clauses with unspecific antecedents. Since unspecific readings of indefinites arise in the scope of intensional operators, constructions of this kind raise the following questions: (1) How do internal and external intensionality interact with each other? and (2) What is the nature of the relation between antecedent and relative clause with respect to the classical restrictive–appositive dichotomy? In previous research on the latter distinction, indefinite antecedents have often been ignored or explicitly excluded from investigation. One reason for this negligence might be that in non-quantified extensional contexts, a truth-conditional distinction between restrictive and appositive modification seems obsolete for indefinite antecedents under a classical Russellian analysis as existential quantifiers (see Geach, 1962:114).¹ However, for indefinites in the scope of quantifiers or intensional operators, truth-conditional differences are expected, and further information- and discourse-structural differences are predicted by a paratactic approach to appositive relativization in the spirit of Ross (1967),

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¹ Similarly, Katz (2008) assumes that relative clauses with indefinite antecedents are *undefined* for restrictivity. Laux 2002 takes their unresolved status as a reason to limit her investigation to definite antecedents. Kamp and Reyle (1993:257) argue that restrictivity of relative clauses under indefinites is epiphenomenal to the specific–unspecific ambiguity of their antecedent. Further references are cited in Martin (2013), who also notices the under-representation of indefinites in the relative clause literature.

Emonds (1979) and Sells (1985). On the other hand, it has been claimed that appositive relatives are excluded under quantified antecedents in the first place (see, e.g., Smith, 1964; Ross, 1967). Sells' work on quantificational subordination in appositives has shown that this generalization cannot be maintained. However, Sells primarily considers extensional and temporal contexts, and the same holds for the few more recent publications on relatives with indefinites antecedents (e.g., Holler, 2005; Del Gobbo, 2003; Nouwen, 2007, 2014; AnderBois et al., 2010). In our investigation of the German data, we want to shift the focus to attitude contexts.

Crucially, our data show multiple ambiguity, with four interpretation patterns arising under an unspecific reading of the indefinite²:

- (1) Die GDL³ sucht Lokführer, die halbtags arbeiten {müssen / sollen}.
 The GDL looks.for train.drivers RP part.time work must shall
The GDL is looking for engine drivers...
 (R) '... who are (presently) obliged to work part-time.'
 (A) 'Whoever they may find will then have to work part-time.'
 (H) '... who are (presently) working part-time.'
 (G) 'Engine drivers have to work part-time.'

In the restrictive reading (R), the modal is interpreted in the scope of the external attitude verb *suchen* and contributes to the restriction of its antecedent. As its semantics is uncontroversial, it will mainly serve for comparison to the other readings. For the second reading (A), we will propose an analysis that combines Roberts' (1989, 1996) concept of *modal subordination* (MS) in anaphoric discourses with Sells' (1985) idea of discourse subordination in appositives. The third reading (H) differs from both the restrictive and the modally subordinated one in that the relative-internal modal does not receive an independent interpretation but basically seems to pick up the modality of the matrix verb, reminiscently of the phenomenon of *modal concord* in sentential complements to attitude verbs (see Geurts and Huitink, 2006; Zeijlstra, 2008). We call this reading *hybrid*⁴ because when checked against a battery of diagnostics like focus projection and interpretation of discourse markers, it seems to satisfy some criteria of appositivity but also some of restrictivity. Moreover, as our discussion will show, both a restrictive and an appositive analysis raise problems with the interpretation of the relative-internal modality. Finally, (G) illustrates an additional appositive reading in which the relative clause contributes a generic assertion about the full extension of the indefinite antecedent and which lacks the conditional dependence of modally subordinated appositives.⁵ Its occurrence seems largely independent from the presence of intensional elements, but the fact that it is available under unspecific indefinites raises further questions concerning the relation between the indefinite and the relative pronoun, which will be addressed shortly in the final chapter.

The goals of this paper are twofold. Firstly, we want to show that attachment of appositive relative clauses (ARCs) to unspecific antecedents is a productive pattern and that the findings of Sells and Roberts can be extended particularly to relative clauses in attitude contexts. Secondly, we want to draw attention to the two additional interpretations (H) and (G) of German relatives. To our knowledge, the hybrid reading is unattested in other languages, and the generic reading has not been addressed explicitly in the literature. Although our discussion of the data remains inconclusive in several aspects, it has repercussions on the restrictive–appositive distinction and on the understanding of modality. First and

² The felicity of each interpretation is sensitive to the presence of additional lexical elements and several other factors, but in principle all of them are (at least marginally) available readings for the core construction.

³ The GDL (Gewerkschaft deutscher Lokführer) is the German labour union of engine drivers.

⁴ Note that our notion of *hybrid relatives* differs from the one in De Vries (2002:184). In a side remark, he uses the term to refer to cases like (i)–(ii), involving exceptional modification of proper names and deictic pronouns. De Vries informally characterizes the RCs in these examples as contributing “further (epithetical) indication who is meant, without there being a set of possibilities”.

- (i) Wij die dapper zijn zullen jullie redden.
 we who brave are will you save
 (ii) Joop die alles weet heeft natuurlijk het laatste woord!
 Joop who everything knows has of.course the final word

It is not entirely clear, however, whether these cases truly conflict with an analysis in terms of appositive modification. In both sentences, an impression of local (and hence restrictive) interpretation might result from the tight rhetorical (causal or explanatory) connection between the RC and the matrix predication, but as we will argue in section 3, this is a typical feature of ARCs. The RC in (ii) might (additionally) receive a restrictive interpretation, since the pronoun *we* is not specified with respect to number and composition of its referents. In this case, the example would in fact provide an exception to the generalization that directly referential expressions cannot be modified restrictively. However, the exceptionality of this interpretation consists in the incomplete form of deixis rather than in the meaning (or attachment) of the relative clause.

⁵ In the example above, the generic reading is only marginally available with the modal *sollen*, but we will consider different cases where this interpretation is supported by additional lexical elements or by the context.

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