Commitment by proxy: Perspective management with transparent free relatives.

Jesse Harris • UCLA

The choice of term used to describe an object or event often conveys an implicit point of view, the connotations of which presumptively default to Speaker commitment or acceptance (Grice 1978; Levinson 2000; Harris and Potts 2009, 2011, a.o.). Speakers may selectively maneuver this default by modifying the *means* by which a potentially controversial element is designated. Here, the term *beergarita* (a literal and linguistic blend of *beer* and *margarita*) is enveloped in a so-called 'transparent free relative' (TFR; Wilder 1999; Grosu 2003; Higgins 1981).

(1)   a. John made Mary a beergarita.   vs.   b. John made Mary *what he calls a <u>beergarita.</u>*

Syntactically, TFRs are free relative clauses that 'stand in proxy' for some constituent contained within the TFR itself. In example (1b), the phrase *what he calls a beergarita* is the TFR, and the underlined NP <u>*beergarita*</u> is the nucleus or pivot element, which sometimes has a quotational or indirect speech effect. Like other types of free relatives (e.g., Bresnan and Grimshaw 1978; Caponigro 2003), TFRs can stand in for many kinds of syntactic categories, but appear most often with NPs. They typically include a verb of saying, such as *call* or *describe as*, that select for equatives or small clauses, or else a clausal hedge, such as *appear to be* or *seem to be.* Here, I focus primarily on the perspectival pragmatics of TFRs.

In English, speakers plausibly rely on multiple quasi-conventionalized cues to navigate discourse commitment (Smith 2003; Harris and Potts 2009). One such cue is the presence of a *source* to which the term can be ascribed (following the notion of source commitments in Gunlogson 2008 and Malamud and Stephenson 2011). Although the variations in (2) are all ambiguous, they differ in whether we can attribute the term *beergarita* to a specific source (*John*) and whether the mode of reference is habitual (*calls*) or episodic (*called*).

(2)   John made Mary what $\begin{Bmatrix} \text{is called} \\ \text{he called} \\ \text{he calls} \end{Bmatrix}$ a beergarita.

Whether the Speaker accepts the appropriateness of the term *beergarita* depends on the extent to which John is deemed a trustworthy or authoritative source. Indeed, authoritative sources can be used to *introduce* the term to an ignorant audience, rather than to reject it; for example, *what we mixologists call a beergarita* identifies the Speaker as an authority. Additional factors such as modality, intonational marking, and non-verbal indicators such as head tilt also play a role in establishing non-Speaker commitment (Harris and Potts 2011), raising the questions in (3).

(3)   i. What cues communicate non-Speaker commitment? Is the presence of a source more important than grammatical markings, like habituality? Do speakers infer non-Speaker commitment on the basis of an unreliable source?

        ii. How reliable are such cues? That is, how certain can a speaker be that her cues will be received in the intended way by her audience?

I present evidence from two human subject studies and, time permitting, a pilot corpus study, which collectively support the following conclusions: presence and type of source modulates understanding of implied commitment to the appropriateness of the term used to designate the nucleus, tense marking is most relevant in the absence of an explicit source, as in *John made Mary what is/was called a beergarita*, and subjects agree on the inferences that are to be drawn from these cues.

In conclusion, TFRs allow a Speaker to explicitly acknowledge a source of attribution for a potentially contentious or unfamiliar term. Subtle cues further permit the Speaker to convey nuances of Speaker commitment. Although the cues that guide these judgments are varied and perhaps not fully conventionalized, they are nevertheless highly regular and reliable. The findings ultimately support a model of pragmatic reasoning in which a rich set of interacting cues conspire to overturn a default Speaker commitment, giving rise to a non-Speaker perspective.

Selected references. Grice 1978. Further notes on logic and conversation. In *Studies in the Way of Words.* Harvard University Press. • Grosu 2003. A unified theory of standard and transparent free relatives. *NLLT*, 21. • Gunlogson 2008. A question of commitment. *Belgian Journal of Linguistics*, 22. • Harris & Potts 2009. Perspective-shifting with appositives and expressives. *L&P*, 36. • Smith 2003. *Modes of discourse.* Cambridge University Press. • Wilder 1999. Transparent free relatives. *WCCFL*, 17.