Nominal Appositives as Speech Acts

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This talk develops an analysis of non-restrictive nominal appositives (NAPs) as independent speech acts that are discursively (but not syntactically) connected to their host sentences. I propose that NAPs are elliptical term answers to *potential questions* (PQs) licensed by the host sentence. To illustrate, the NAP *Peter* in (1) corresponds to (1c), which answers the PQ in (1b), licensed by the host (1a); the NAP *a friend of mine* in (2) corresponds to (2c), which answers a PQ about the referent of its anchor *Peter* (2b), introduced by the host (2a).

(1) A friend of mine, *Peter*, danced last night.
   a. A friend of mine danced last night.
   b. Which friend of yours danced last night?
   c. *Peter* ~~danced last night~~.

(2) Peter, *a friend of mine*, danced last night.
   a. Peter danced last night.
   b. Who is Peter?
   c. ~~He is~~ *a friend of mine*.

Accordingly, I refer to NAPs such as (1) that answer a PQ which reformulates the host as *reformulating NAPs* (R-NAPs) and to NAPs such as (2) that answer a property-requesting PQ as *copular NAPs* (C-NAPs). Simplifying slightly, I follow Onea (2016) in assuming that a PQ ϕ is licensed by an utterance α in a given discourse state D iff ϕ's presuppositions are not satisfied in D but are satisfied in $D + \alpha$. For example, (1a) licenses (1b) because (1b) presupposes exactly the information conveyed by (1a). Similarly, (2a) licenses (2b) by providing the DP *Peter*, which presupposes existence and/or familiarity of its referent.

Ellipsis in NAPs is licensed under question/answer congruence (Rooth 1992). For example, the licensed PQ (1b) denotes a set of possible answers (3); any answer that is an element of this set will then permit deletion up to F-marking (Reich 2007). Hence, the fragment *Peter* in (1) can only be resolved as (4a), but not as (4b) or any other sentence that fails to reformulate the host.

(3) [[Which friend of yours danced last night?]]
   = {Mary danced last night, Peter danced last night, …}

(4) a. Peter_F ~~danced last night~~.
   b. Peter_F ~~ate popcorn yesterday~~.

Mutatis mutandis for the NAP in (2), which is resolved against the PQ in (2b). This analysis directly and straightforwardly predicts the *prima facie* surprising fact, visible in languages like German, that R-NAPs match their anchors in case (5a), whereas C-NAPs bear invariant nominative case (Heringa 2012). In both cases, the case of the NAP necessarily matches the case of the *wh*-phrase in the PQ addressed by the congruent answer underlying the NAP.

As answers to PQs, NAPs are independent speech acts (SAs); this correlates with their status as syntactically independent, elliptical root clauses. As such, they are correctly predicted to be opaque to syntactic dependencies (scope, binding, extraction, agreement) from within the host (Ott 2015), and to be truth-functionally independent of the latter (Potts 2005). As SAs, NAPs can contain illocutionary modifiers such as sentence adverbs and modal particles (5a), whose scope is then restricted to the NAP. Furthermore, NAPs can differ in illocutionary force from their host sentence (5b,c), highlighting their status as independent SAs (Acuña-Farina 1999).

(5) a. Sie hat einen Freund, *angeblich wohl den Peter*, in der Stadt getroffen. (German)
   she has a.ACC friend allegedly PRT the.ACC Peter in the city met
   "She met a friend, allegedly Peter, in the city."

   b. Is Jane, *the best doctor in town*, already married?
   c. ~~She is~~ [the best doctor in town]$_F$.

Prosodic properties of NAPs further corroborate this analysis (cf. Truckenbrodt 2014). NAP and host are strictly independent stress domains, i.e. each must realize sentence stress. This shows

that NAPs are intonation phrases (IPs); given that, on my analysis, they are root clauses, this need not be stipulated but follows on standard assumptions about the syntax—prosody mapping (e.g. Selkirk's 2011 MATCH(Clause,*ι*)). Since NAP interpolation causes the prosodic disruption of the host, each of the resulting prosodic units must form an independent IP. This explains the prosodic separation ("comma intonation") of NAPs and constrains their interpolation, which is infelicitous whenever it gives rise to free-floating prosodically weak elements ((6a) vs. (6b,c)).

(6) a. ??(I called a FRIEND)$_{IP}$, (*PETER*)$_{IP}$, (up)$_{??}$. b. (I called up a FRIEND)$_{IP}$ (*PETER*)$_{IP}$.

c. (I called up a FRIEND)$_{IP}$ (*PETER*)$_{IP}$ (right after BREAKfast)$_{IP}$.

Since NAPs, being root clauses, are independently computed expressions, their external distribution is constrained by general discourse-pragmatic principles alone. This leads to an apparent paradox, since implicit questions are not generally assumed to license elliptical answers. I suggest, however, that NAPs are licit only in environments in which the PQ they address can be safely accommodated even on the basis of a fragment answer, given the congruence of questions and felicitous answers as well as further cues. One important factor is the incremental licensing of PQs, which is reflected in constraints on the linear interpolation of NAPs. As illustrated in (7), the positioning of NAPs is flexible but not unconstrained: the R-NAP in (7b) can either follow its host sentence (as an 'afterthought,' ✓$_3$), its XP-anchor (✓$_1$), or the anchor's minimal clause (✓$_2$); but it cannot surface right-adjacent to some unrelated anchor (✗$_3$).

(7) a. Ich ✗$_1$ habe ✗$_2$ einen Freund ✓$_1$ gebeten ✓$_2$ die Akten ✗$_3$ zu vernichten. ✓$_3$ (German)
I have a.ACC friend asked the files to destroy

b. ~~Ich habe~~ [*den Peter*]$_F$ ~~gebeten die Akten zu vernichten~~.
I have ACC Peter asked the files to destroy 'I asked Peter to destroy the files.'

To explain this behavior, I argue that PQs are licensed incrementally in the left-to-right processing of utterances. Before the host is processed in its entirety, missing material required for propositional interpretation is considered existentially closed, thereby licensing questions of higher generality than the eventual, fully specific PQ. NAPs can then be felicitously interpolated where a relevant PQ is licensed and salient (and prosodic prerequisites are met, recall (6)). This is illustrated for (7) in (8) below (A = answer). No PQ that could be answered by (7b) can be accommodated before its anchor is introduced in discourse (8a); hence, ✗$_1$ and ✗$_2$ are illicit interpolation positions. By contrast, the NAP is licit at position ✓$_3$, where a fully specific reformulating PQ is licensed (not shown below). Similarly, the NAP is licit at any prior point at which a more general PQ is licensed that could be answered by the NAP (✓$_1$ = (8b), ✓$_2$ = (8c)). Finally, at ✗$_3$ the most salient PQs concern *die Akten* 'the files,' which (7b) cannot answer (8d).

(8) a. Ich (habe)… → PQ: … → A: #(8b) ✗$_{1/2}$

b. Ich habe einen Freund… → PQ: ∃*x*:which friend did you x_{VP}? → A: (8b) ✓$_{\square}$

c. Ich habe einen Freund gebeten… → PQ: ∃*x*:which friend did you ask x_{CP}? → A: (8b) ✓$_{\square}$

d. Ich habe einen Freund gebeten, die Akten… → PQ: … → A: #(8b) ✗$_{\blacktriangleleft}$

My analysis of NAPs as SAs thus captures their syntactic, prosodic and semantic autonomy, as well as their felicity and positioning relative to their hosts and anchors, given independently motivated assumptions about the licensing of PQs and question/answer congruence.

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