PRESUPPOSITIONAL SUBJECTS AND INCREMENTAL INTERPRETATION

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1. *Presuppositionality.* Diesing (1992), Ladusaw (1994), Kratzer (1995) argue that indefinite subjects of individual-level predicates carry the presupposition that their NP constituent denotes a nonempty set: e.g. (1a) is infelicitous in a context where there are no firemen. By contrast, indefinite subjects of stage-level predicates also allow a non-presuppositional interpretation: e.g. (1b) is judged false, rather than infelicitous, in a context with no firemen.

(1) a. Some firemen are altruistic.   (i-level, + presupp)
     b. There are some firemen available.   (s-level, - presupp)

According to Diesing and Kratzer, indefinite subjects are presuppositional when they are interpreted outside VP and are mapped into generalized quantifiers, whereas they are non-presuppositional when they remain within VP, they are mapped to Heimian indefinites, and undergo Existential Closure. Ladusaw (1994) proposed that presuppositionality in (1a) is due to a categorical LF, where the subject is interpreted outside the predicative nucleus and the nucleus denotes a one-place property, as opposed a thetic LF in (1b), in which the subject is interpreted within the predicative nucleus, as part of a situation description.

2. *The transparent reading.* Schwarz (2012) discusses the contrast in (2): the weak (nonpresuppositional) indefinite in (2a) is interpreted relative to the same situation as the verbal predicate of the clause, whereas a strong (presuppositional) indefinite in (2b) can be interpreted relative to a situation introduced in a higher clause:

(2) a. # Mary thinks there's someone in this room outside.   (* transparent reading)
     b.   Mary thinks that someone in this room is outside.   (√ transparent reading)

Based on the framework of Kratzer (1989), Schwarz argues that in (2b) the strong Determiner of the indefinite subject introduces a resource situation pronoun; this can remain unbound and be assigned a contextually salient situation, or be bound by the topmost lambda-binder from the matrix clause (corresponding to the topic situation of the whole proposition): both options give rise to the transparent reading. As for (2a), Schwarz argues that weak Determiners do not introduce a resource situation pronoun: the subject can only be interpreted in the scope of the intensional verb – thus lacking a transparent reading, and resulting in a contradictory belief.

3. *A convergence.* The parallelism between (1a) and (2b) vs. (1b) and (2a) suggests that we may try to reduce presuppositionality and the transparent reading to a common source.
In fact, an Austinian proposition is a pair composed of a property of situations (Schwarz's clause denotation) and a topic situation of which the property is predicated (Klein 2008). From this perspective, we can rethink the thetic/categorical divide as follows:
i) in a thetic structure like (1b), the weak subject is interpreted within the property-denoting predicative nucleus, and the property is predicated of a salient topic situation;
ii) in a categorical structure like (1a), the subject quantifies over individual situations ("thick" particulars in Kratzer 1989) which are required to *overlap with the topic situation* (McKenzie 2012).
The presuppositionality of categorical subjects follows from the fact that (a) they overlap the topic situation, (b) the topic situation has to be *part of the same world* as the utterance situation (apart from modal subordination à la Roberts 1987). The transparent reading also follows from the anchoring of categorical subjects to the utterance world; this holds even when the topic situation is shifted to the past (*Mary thought that somebody in the room was outside*).

4. *A syntactic asymmetry.* The proposed view implies that categorical subjects, being linked to the topic situation, cannot be interpreted within the predicative nucleus, contrary to thetic subjects. This is supported by syntactic evidence:

– categorical subjects of i-level predicates differ from thetic subjects in that they cannot occupy a position internal to the predicative nucleus, cf. (3) vs. (1b):

(3) * There are some firemen altruistic.

– thetic subjects can occupy a preverbal position (4a), but this position is syntactically lower than that of categorical subjects: it disallows VP deletion ((4b), Kiss 1996) and it receives main stress within the predicative nucleus ((4c), Lambrecht 1994, Kratzer & Selkirk 2007).

 (4) a. A flood occurred.
     b. * A flood occurred and then a riot did [VP e].
     c. A flóod occurred. / * A flóod occúrred.

5. *Incremental interpretation.* Following Klein (2008), the predicative nucleus of a sentence is asserted to hold of the topic situation: the latter is the starting point for truth assessment. In an incremental process, we therefore expect that its interpretation cannot be delayed.
Bianchi & Chesi (2014, 2015) show that categorical subjects block extraction of an internal constituent (5a), whereas thetic subjects allow it (5b):

(5) a. ?* Of which masterpiece is [one reproduction _] absolutely perfect?
     b.   Of which masterpiece is [one reproduction _] already available?

In a nutshell, their idea is that a filler-gap dependency cannot terminate within a preverbal subject because the latter is not lexically selected by a predicate. In an incremental top-down, left-to-right computation, the grammaticality of (5b) is reduced to the possibility of delaying the saturation of the selectional requirement of the head noun *reproduction* until the point when the main predicate has been computed and the subject NP is properly selected by it ("subject reconstruction"). Strong support for an approach in terms of delayed evaluation comes from the minimal contrast between (5b) and (6) (Bianchi & Chesi 2015):

(6) ?* Which masterpiece is [one reproduction of _] already available?

In (6), the preposition *of* "stranded" within the preverbal subject indicates that the saturation of the noun's selectional requirement has not been delayed; but the filler-gap dependency cannot terminate within the preverbal subject, leading to ungrammaticality.
The deviance of (5a) indicates that categorical subjects, contrary to thetic ones, disallow delayed evaluation. From the present perspective, this is reduced to the hypothesis (ii) that categorical subjects are linked to the topic situation. In fact, this evidence suggests the more radical view that a categorical subject is itself the topic situation, and as such, its interpretation cannot be delayed. This view, though admittedly counter-intuitive, might shed light on the otherwise mysterious connection between syntactically "high" preverbal subjects and finite Tense.

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