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Appositives and the limits of predication*

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Abstract: While nominals—particularly definites—typically occur in argument positions, it is well-known that in English and many other languages nominals can also appear in predicate position. Such cases of nominal predication have been classified into a number of different types, but there are influential arguments in the syntactic literature that a single kind of nominal predication underlies the apparent diversity. This paper argues that nominal appositions can provide new evidence concerning the interpretation of nominals in non-verbal constructions, adding to the existing case that at least the simplest type of reduction is not viable.

Keywords: apposition, predication, nominal-predication, specification, ellipsis, English, German, Russian

1. Introduction

An important issue in the study of predication has been the question of how it can be that nominal projections—typically associated with argument positions—can nevertheless function as predicates. As is well known, English allows not only adjectival predicates as in (1a), but also nominal predicates like those in (1b,c). Note in particular that examples like (1c) show that nominals in predicate position—whether in a full copular clause as in (1ci) or in a small clause as in (1cii)—do not have to be indefinite.

- (1) a. (i) Anke is intelligent. (ii) I consider [Anke intelligent].
 b. (i) Anke is an asset. (ii) I consider [Anke an asset].
 c. (i) Anke is the principal beneficiary.
 (ii) I consider [Anke the principal beneficiary].

Since the seminal work of Higgins (1973) it has become common to classify copular clauses with nominals in “predicate” position into at least three types. In PREDICATIVE/PREDICATIONAL clauses (illustrated above in (1b,c), the postcopular

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nominal phrase does not refer to an individual, and instead is generally taken to have the same $\langle e, t \rangle$ semantic type as an adjective phrase in the same position. It is characteristic of this type that the nominal predicate can appear in a small clause, as in (1b,cii) as well as in a full copular clause with *be*, as in (1b,ci). Nominal predicates of this type can also be coordinated with adjectives as in (2):

- (2) Anke is very intelligent, and {an asset to our company / the best woman for the job.

In EQUATIVE/EQUATIONAL¹ clauses (illustrated in (3a,b)), the traditional analysis is that both the subject and the “predicate” nominal refer to individuals—that is, they are of semantic type *e*.

- (3) a. It’s perfectly possible to like Jiroo but dislike Nao!
 Jiroo is not Nao! [Equative]
 b. You can’t really like Richard Bachmann but not like Stephen King.
 Richard Bachmann is Stephen King! [Equative]

Given this semantic type, an either explicit or implicit part of many analyses is that English has a distinct *be* that occurs in equative clauses like those in (3) that can combine two arguments of type *e* and expresses a relation of identity. On the other hand, the copula that appears in predicational clauses like those in (1) and (2) is a semantically vacuous support for tense and agreement features. It follows from this that there are no equative small clauses, since these by definition lack such a copula, and there is then no way for the two nominals to combine semantically:

- (4) a. With [Richard Bachmann the most famous writer in the room], the camera operators all gathered around him. [Predicational]
 b. *With [Richard Bachmann Stephen King], we only need to set one place at the fiction writers’ table. [Equative]

Finally, SPECIFICATIONAL clauses, illustrated in (5), can have a referring expression in postcopular position (like equatives), but feature a subject that appears to get a different, non-referring interpretation, the exact nature of which has been much disputed (more on this below).²

- (5) a. The correct phone number for him is 01546 2789. [Specificational]
 b. The {principal beneficiary/culprit/source of the rumour} is Anke, isn’t it? [Specificational]

¹ The terminology in this area is quite unstable. Both “equative” and “equational” are used in the literature with the same meaning, and the same is true of “predicative” and “predicational.” From now on, to avoid redundancy, I will use “equative” and “predicational” for these two types.

² Higgins discussed a fourth type, IDENTIFICATIONAL, where the subject is a deictic like *this* or *that*, as in *This is my friend Louise*, but I set these aside here.

For more detailed discussion of these categories and the diagnostics that have been used to justify them, see Higgins (1973), Mikkelsen (2011), Heycock (2021).

Despite the frequent reference to, and use of, this categorization since Higgins' work in the 1970s, there has been a good deal of effort devoted to attempts to simplify it. In particular, in work over the last thirty years, Andrea Moro has argued that fundamentally a single structure and interpretation underlies the three types of copular clause just mentioned (Moro 1997; 2006; 2017).

The examples of predications given above take the form of full clauses featuring the copular verb *be* (as for example in (1bi,1ci), (2) and (3)) or “small clauses” (as in (1bii,1cii)). But Heringa (2011; 2012) has argued, following Doron (1994), that exactly the same types of predication can be observed in nominal appositions, where the predicate nominal is the *appositive expression* (indicated here in italics), and the subject is a (generally covert) pronoun anaphoric to the **anchor** (indicated here in bold face).³

- (6) a. **Christine**, *the best student* in the class, applied for a patent. [Predicational]
 b. Bo introduced **Ingrid's sister**, *that woman* at the back. [Equative]
 c. **The culprit**, *in actuality Kim*, was previously thought to be Kay. [Specificational]

The aim of this paper is to investigate the extent to which nominal appositives such as the ones in (6) can shed light on the analysis of nominal predication more generally. Specifically, I will argue that appositives provide some evidence that the radical simplification of the categories of nominal predication developed in the work of Moro needs to be revised.

2. Are all copular sentences predicational?

As mentioned above, in Moro's influential work (which builds on some of the ideas in Williams (1983), Partee (1986), Heggie (1988) and has in turn been adopted and adapted by numerous subsequent authors, including Heycock (1991), Mikkelsen (2005), den Dikken (2006)), it is proposed that in fact all copular clauses can be reduced in some sense to the predicational type:

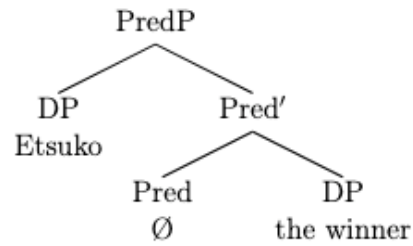
- (7) “one of the two noun phrases involved in a copular sentence always plays the role of a predicate.” (Moro 2006; 2017)

Glossing over many of the details of the analysis, the predicational type of copular clause involves a small clause with a functional head (here designated as Pred, following Svenonius (1994)). This small clause can either appear intact (as in the complement to verbs like *consider* in (1) above), or can be the complement to the copula *be*, which hosts inflectional material but is otherwise semantically vacuous, allowing for the raising of the subject of the small clause to the matrix subject position, along the lines of (8):

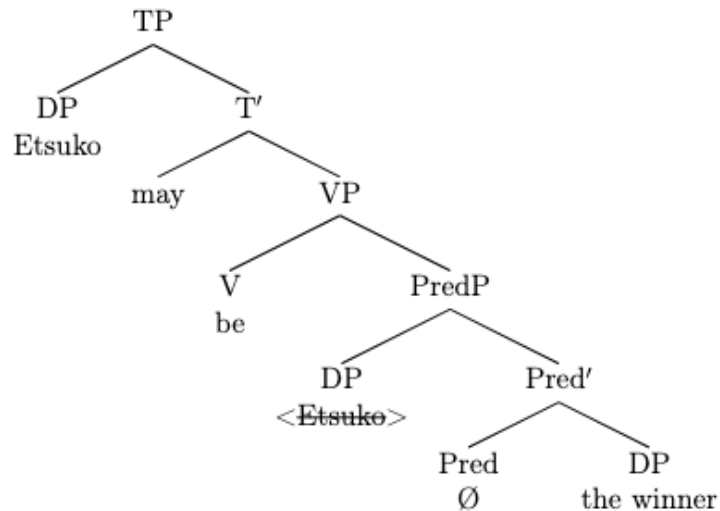
³ Heringa in fact takes specificational clauses just to be a subtype of equatives, but he does not give examples of appositions that correspond closely to typically cited examples of specification in particular. However, it is possible to construct such examples, as in (6c) in the text here.

(8) a.

We consider ...

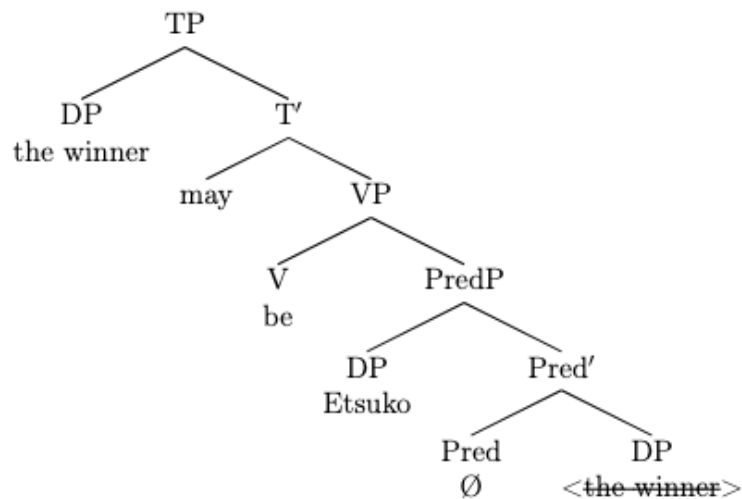


b.



The specificational type has essentially the same ingredients, but as the derivation progresses, instead of the small clause subject raising into the matrix, it is instead the predicate of the small clause that moves to this position, hence Moro's term of INVERSE PREDICATION, rather than Higgins' SPECIFICATION, for this type of copular clause:

(9)



As for equative clauses, Moro's argument is that, despite appearances, actually one of the nominals is always predicative, in line with his claim cited in (7). The evidence for

this position that he gives in Moro (2006; 2017) comes from binding. He cites (10) as a typical exemplar for the equative clause type, and points out that if the second nominal is replaced by a possessed noun phrase as in (11), there is an obviation effect—the pronominal possessor in the second nominal cannot co-refer with the subject of the clause, as shown in (11a); the same effect is seen in (11b).⁴

- (10) The morning star is the evening star.
 (11) a. *[The morning star]_i is its_i source of energy.
 b. *John_i is his_i cook.

This obviation effect, as Moro points out, is not observed in sentences with similar meanings where the second nominal is in an argument position:

- (12) a. [The morning star]_i is one and the same as its_i source of energy.
 b. John_i is identical to his_i cook.

From this Moro concludes that there are no actual equative clauses (copular clauses where both nominals are referring expressions); if the first nominal refers to an individual, then the second nominal is necessarily a predicate.

3. The existence of equatives

As Moro pointed out, given a copular clause featuring one or more definite description, it can be very hard to find clear evidence for the referential or predicative status of either nominal. Here however we may look to appositions, since the interpretation of the anchor has to be appropriate for the role that it plays in the matrix clause. Examples like those in (13), then, provide some evidence that we cannot so easily dismiss the possibility of an equative relation between two referential noun phrases:

- (13) a. **His wife**, *that woman who we bumped into yesterday*, turns out to be mayor of Manchester.
 b. **The mayor of London**, *that controversial politician Sadiq Khan*, has just left the building.

The anchors (*his wife* and *the mayor of London*) must be referring expressions. In the case of *his wife* in (13a), it is the (raised) subject of a predicative copular clause, as we can tell since the determinerless phrase *mayor of Manchester* can only be a predicate. In the case of (13b), the anchor *the mayor of London* functions as the subject of the verbal predicate *leave the building* and can therefore also not be predicative in type. The appositional phrases *that woman who we bumped into yesterday* and *that controversial politician Sadiq Khan* are also typical referring expressions, both being introduced by demonstratives. Thus these examples of apposition provide evidence that in fact we need to

⁴ Both examples in (11) can be made fully grammatical with the indicated coreference if *own* is included after the possessive pronoun (*The morning star is its own source of energy; John is his own cook*). Moro does not discuss this explicitly, but presumably the idea is that *its/his own* is some kind of reflexive. See Charnavel (2012; 2020) for discussion of the distribution of a similar item in French.

allow for the possibility of a copular relation where both nominals are referring expressions.⁵

As mentioned earlier, in the analysis of apposition in Heringa (2011; 2012), the subject of the apposition is not the anchor itself, but rather a (generally but not always covert) E-type pronoun relating to it. This of course makes the relation between the anchor and the appositive nominal rather less direct, so we may wonder whether the referential anchor may nevertheless antecede a silent pronoun that is an appropriate subject for a specificational relation with the appositive. There is however some evidence against this possibility. As has been much discussed (see in particular Mikkelsen (2005)), pronominal reference back to specificational subjects in English must be with a neuter pronoun, and pronominal subjects of specificational sentences must be neuter, even when the postcopular nominal is human:

- (14) a. The current mayor of London is Sadiq Khan, isn't **it**?
 b. The mayor of London at present is Sadiq Khan. I remember when it was Boris Johnson.

It seems at best infelicitous, however, to use a neuter pronoun in a copular sentence following on from (13a,b):

- (15) a. **His wife**, *that woman who we bumped into yesterday*, turns out to be mayor of Manchester. #It is the famous author Joan McCormack.
 b. **The mayor of London**, *that controversial politician Sadiq Khan*, has just left the building. #It was once Boris Johnson.

This suggests, then, that the elliptical copular clauses constituting the appositions in (13) cannot be specificational.

In fact it turns out that the diagnostic of pronominal binding that Moro invoked as evidence for his claim that one of the nominals in any apparent equative always “plays the role of a predicate”—see examples (10)–(12)—actually also points to the existence of equatives, if we consider some further cases. For example, it is indeed the case that on the interpretation *John cooks for himself*, the example in (11b), repeated here as (16), is impossible with co-reference.

- (16) * John_i is his_i cook.

⁵ Marcel den Dikken (personal communication) raised the question of whether non-restrictive relativization might show that the covert copular clause that is the basis for the apposition in examples like (15) is actually specificational in nature, rather than equative. This suggestion was based on the supposition that the preferred relative pronoun in the relevant cases would be *which* rather than *who*. However, in my own judgment non-restrictive relatives introduced by *which* in these sentences are unnatural at best:

- (i) ?* His wife, which is that woman who we bumped into yesterday, turns out to be mayor of Manchester.
 (ii) ?* The mayor of London, which is that controversial politician Sadiq Khan, has just left the building.

But this is not the kind of interpretation that is generally expected for an equative, which prototypically express the speaker's realisation/conclusion that two names or definite descriptions that they had taken to refer to two distinct individuals in fact pick out the same individual (or, in the negative, emphasize the opposite), as in the examples in (3) above. And if we set up the context for such an interpretation, the obviation effect observed by Moro disappears:

- (17) John's cook produces delicious food. But unfortunately, today John himself is cooking for us. And as you can tell, John_i is not his_i cook!

If, as Moro assumes, the obviation effect diagnoses the predicative status of the postcopular nominal, in (17) the postcopular nominal is not being used predicatively, but rather refers to an individual, as expected for an equative under the traditional interpretation.

Note that this is not to say that there is semantic symmetry in such "equative" examples. A slightly different type of example, involving cases of mistaken identity, also involves two referring expressions and, as expected from what we have seen so far, shows no obviation effect:

- (18) When I walked into the badly-lit room, it was hard to make out people's faces, and I kept making mistakes, which was a bit embarrassing. For a moment, for example, I thought that Mary_i was her_i mother!

Nevertheless, as discussed and analyzed in detail in Percus & Sharvit (2024), such examples are semantically asymmetric: from the statement in (18) we cannot conclude that the speaker thought at any point that Mary's mother was Mary. While this particular asymmetry does not obtain in examples like (17), examples like (18) are enough to demonstrate that in a copular clause there must be some way(s) of obtaining a predicate that nevertheless includes a referring expression. Sharvit & Percus analyze the semantics of such a case; it remains to be determined what the syntax is.

4. The nature of the subject of specificational sentences

We have just seen that evidence from appositions converges with other evidence that not all equative copular sentences can be reduced to the predicational type in the way that was envisaged in Moro's work. In this section I hope to show that appositions can inform our understanding of nominal predication also with respect to the specificational type.

As discussed briefly above, recent syntactic literature largely adopts the proposal that in a specificational sentence the initial nominal is predicative (a function of type $\langle e, t \rangle$), and is in fact predicated of the postcopular nominal (see in particular Moro (1997; 2006; 2017), Mikkelsen (2005)). However, there is an alternative view according to which the subject of a specificational sentence instead has the type of an INDIVIDUAL CONCEPT: a function from worlds to individuals ($\langle s, e \rangle$). This proposal is due to Romero (2005) and has since been defended in Heycock (2012) and Arregi et al. (2021).

The principal argument in Heycock (2012) against the proposal that the subject of a specificational sentence is a predicate goes back to the observation in Heycock & Kroch (1999: 379) that examples like (19)–(21) show that it is not in fact possible to interpret the initial nominal in a specificational sentence as predicated of the second. That is,

definite nominals headed by *thing* and *kind* can be predicated of individuals (for a semantic analysis of such predications, see in particular Moltmann (2003)):

- (19) a. John is *the one thing that I want a man to be*. He's honest.
b. There are sympathetic nurses and callous nurses. Sylvie is *the second kind of nurse*.

They can also be equated to other properties/kinds, and in this case the two nominals can appear in either order:

- (20) a. The one thing I want a man to be is honest. /
Honest is the one thing I want a man to be.
b. The hospital nurse is the first kind of nurse I want to mention.
The community nurse is the second kind of nurse. /
The second kind of nurse is the community nurse.

In sharp contrast, the predicational examples in (19) cannot be “inverted:”⁶

- (21) a. #The one thing I want a man to be is John.
b. #The second kind of nurse is Mary.

These cases are important because they are instances where there is a definite predicate but where an analysis involving any kind of equation can be ruled out. For further arguments that the initial nominal in a specificational sentence is not a predicate, see Arregi et al. (2021).

Further, both Heycock (2012) and Arregi et al. (2021) give arguments in favour of analyzing the initial nominal as denoting an individual concept. For example it has been argued (Mikkelsen 2005) that pronominalization with a neuter pronoun as in (14) above, repeated here as (22a), is evidence that the antecedent—the subject of the specificational clause—is a predicate, along the lines of (22b), where *it* is anaphoric to the predicate *clever/a grandmother*:

- (22) a. The current mayor of London is Sadiq Khan, isn't it?
b. She is clever/a grandmother, even though she doesn't look it.

However, if the subject of the specificational clause is a predicate, the obligatory plural pronominal referring back to it in examples like (23a) is unexpected—compare (23b).

- (23) a. Her favourite composers are Bach and Beethoven, aren't they / *isn't it?
b. Those women are clever/grandmothers, even though they don't look it/*them.

⁶ The example in (21a) can be coerced into grammaticality under a reading where *John* becomes a predicate that is equated with the predicate *the one thing I want a man to be*. I.e. it is (somewhat marginally) acceptable under the reading that the speaker wants all men to be John. But this is clearly a quite different predication than the one in (19a); rather it is an equation of two predicates along the same lines as (20a,b).

That is, while English makes very little use of overt pronominal anaphora to predicates, strongly favoring ellipsis instead (*Ibrahim is annoyed, and I am {Ø/*it} too*), to the extent that it is possible, as in the expression *to look X*, it follows the pattern observed in a number of other languages, including numerous varieties of Germanic, in using the least marked pronoun (neuter singular in the common Germanic three-gender system, masculine singular in Romance). That would make the plural *they* in (23a) an isolated exception if it is to be taken as predicate anaphora.

On the other hand, this pronominalization pattern is exactly what is observed for CONCEALED QUESTIONS, as in (24), where these too have been analyzed as individual concepts (see discussion in Heycock (2012)).

- (24) a. I guessed the winner of the Oscar for Best Actress before you guessed it.
 b. I guessed the winners of the Oscars before you guessed *it/them.

Another argument in the same direction is that predicates like *rise* as in *The temperature is rising* have been analyzed as selecting individual concepts as their subjects. Such predicates can be coordinated with the VPs in specificational sentences, suggesting—under the assumption that coordination applies to constituents of the same semantic type—that these too must select for individual concepts as subjects.

- (25) The temperature is 30 and is rising.

See Arregi et al. (2021) for this and further arguments.

Can we find evidence from apposition in favor of either position? We have already seen that anchors that are themselves the subjects of specificational sentences can host appositions that are also specificational—see (6c) above, repeated here as (26):

- (26) **The culprit**, *in actuality Kim*, was previously thought to be Kay.

This in itself does not distinguish between possible accounts concerning the interpretation of the subject. Importantly, however, it seems that when the anchor is in an unambiguously predicative position, it cannot host a specificational appositive. In my judgment, (27) is severely degraded.

- (27) *Most people considered Kay **the culprit**, *in actuality Kim*.

This is consonant, of course, with the contention that the subject of a specificational relation (*The culprit is Kim*) is not the same type as a predicate (*Most people considered [Kay the culprit]*).⁷

⁷ The relation of appositives to non-restrictive relatives, already mentioned in footnote 5, was raised with respect to these examples by Tommy Tsz-Ming Lee and Ian Roberts (personal communications). The question is whether non-restrictive relatives similar to appositives like (27) are grammatical:

(i) ?Most considered Kay the culprit, which in actuality was Kim.

I find judgments on these cases quite difficult, but (i) does seem to me to be fairly acceptable, and other examples are possibly even better:

(ii) Most people wrongly consider 10 the correct answer, which in fact is 13.

And in contrast, an anchor that is interpreted as a concealed question (28a,b), or as the subject of a predicate like *rise* (28c), can easily host such an appositive:

- (28) a. We failed to guess his phone number, in actuality 01546 2789.
 b. His phone number, in actuality 01546 2789, was not known to me at the time.
 c. The temperature, currently 30, is rising all the time.

Thus appositions provide additional evidence in favour of the analysis of the subject of a specificational sentence as an individual concept, rather than a predicate.

5. Appositions as fragment answers? Some consequences and considerations

In the discussion so far, I have been assuming an account of nominal apposition along the lines of Heringa (2011; 2012), according to which the appositive nominal is part of a partially covert copular clause. The subject of this appositive clause is a generally covert E-type pronoun; the appositive clause itself is linked to the assertive clause by a special type of relation, distinct from the one arising from “ordinary” Merge.

In the account of nominal appositions set out in Onea & Ott (2022), on the other hand, the apposition is the fragment answer to an implicit POTENTIAL QUESTION. This account, the authors argue, has the virtue of not requiring any special syntactic relation or derivational process. The authors propose that there are essentially two types of potential question that can arise in discourse and be pre-emptively “answered” by an apposition.

On the one hand, what Heringa analyzed as specificational/equative appositions are argued to involve the elliptical answers to potential questions that recapitulate the form of the asserted clause that hosts them. That is, if we take an example like (29), the idea is that the main assertion is as in (30a). This gives rise to the potential question in (30b), which in turn is answered by the fragment answer in (30c).

- (29) I met **an old friend**, *Sam*, at the pub yesterday.
 (30) a. I met an old friend at the pub yesterday. [ASSERTION]
 b. Which friend did you meet at the pub yesterday? [POTENTIAL QUESTION]
 c. ~~I met Sam at the pub yesterday.~~ [FRAGMENT ANSWER]

An apposition that is based on this type of potential question they refer to as a REFORMULATING apposition.

Heringa’s predicative appositions, on the other hand, are argued to be responses to the second type of potential question that can arise: a copular one. Thus the assertion in (31) is the one represented in (32a). This gives rise to the potential question in (32b). Note that unlike the reformulating apposition just discussed, here the potential question does not recapitulate the form of the assertion, but is instead a copular clause. The fragment answer is as in (32c)

I do not as yet have any understanding of why these relative clauses should be much more acceptable than the appositions that they correspond to so closely, but this is clearly a question that merits investigation. It may be relevant to note that non-restrictive relatives based on non-copular structures are also possible in this position:

- (iii) Most people consider 10 the correct answer, which changes every year.

- (31) I met **Sam**, *an old friend*, at the pub yesterday.
- (32) a. I met Sam at the pub yesterday. [ASSERTION]
 b. Who is Sam? [POTENTIAL QUESTION]
 c. ~~Sam is~~ an old friend. [FRAGMENT ANSWER]

Like Heringa, Onea & Ott call this type a PREDICATIVE apposition. And indeed, here their analysis is much more similar to Heringa's in that in both cases it is proposed that the appositive phrase (*an old friend* in (31)) is the postcopular nominal in an elliptical copular clause.

If Onea & Ott's analysis is correct, this has consequences for the discussion of equative appositions in Section 3 above. That is, the examples in (13) above, repeated here as (33), could potentially be analyzed as reformulating appositions along the same lines as (29), (30).

- (33) a. **His wife**, *that woman who we bumped into yesterday*, turns out to be mayor of Manchester.
 b. **The mayor of London**, *that controversial politician Sadiq Khan*, has just left the building.

As a reformulating apposition, the analysis of (33a) would be as follows:

- (34) a. His wife turns out to be mayor of Manchester. [ASSERTION]
 b. Who turns out to be mayor of Manchester? [POTENTIAL QUESTION]
 c. That woman who we bumped into yesterday ~~turns out to be mayor of~~
Manchester. [FRAGMENT ANSWER]

As illustrated, under this analysis, at no point is there any copular clause, whether overt or covert, relating the two referring expressions *his wife* and *that woman who we bumped into yesterday*. In consequence, while this analysis does not provide any evidence against the existence of equatives in the sense of copular clauses involving two referring expressions, it no longer provides any argument in favor.

On the other hand, the argument concerning the interpretation of specificational subjects set out in Section 4 remains the same under the analysis of apposition by Onea & Ott. Examples of grammatical specificational apposition given above are repeated here:

- (35) a. **The culprit**, *in actuality Kim*, was previously thought to be Kay.
 b. We failed to guess **his phone number**, *in actuality 01546 2789*.
 c. **His phone number**, *in actuality 01546 2789*, was not known to me at the time.
 e. **The temperature**, *currently 30*, is rising all the time.

Such examples could not be analyzed as reformulating appositions within the framework of Onea and Ott, but would have to be included in their category of predicative appositions.⁸ To see this, consider the example just given as (35a). If we assume that this

⁸ At this point the terminology becomes potentially quite confusing. Heringa uses "predicative" in the sense of Higgins (1973), as just one of the possible categories of copular clause. Predicative apposition therefore stands in opposition to what he classifies

is an example of Onea & Ott’s predicative apposition—that is, an apposition where the potential question is a copular clause—the analysis would be along the lines of (36):

- (36) a. The culprit was previously thought to be Kay. [ASSERTION]
 b. Who was the culprit? [POTENTIAL QUESTION]
 c. In actuality ~~the culprit was~~ Kim. [FRAGMENT ANSWER]

Conversely, the “reformulating” potential question + answer would be incoherent, and does not correspond to the interpretation of the original sentence:

- (37) a. The culprit was previously thought to be Kay [ASSERTION]
 b. Who/what was previously thought to be Kay? [POTENTIAL QUESTION]
 c. #In actuality Kim ~~was thought to be Kay~~. [FRAGMENT ANSWER]

The specificational appositions discussed above, then, would be analyzed within the framework of Onea & Ott as involving elliptical copular clauses, in essentially the same way—at least for our purposes here—as was the case within the framework of Heringa. In consequence, the arguments in Section 4 are unaffected.

In this short paper I have not been able to pursue to any level of detail questions concerning the syntax of apposition. However, I would like to close with a short observation concerning the accounts on which I have been drawing. As mentioned, the analysis of Onea & Ott does have a conceptual advantage over that of Heringa in that it attempts to derive the properties of apposition without invoking novel syntactic operations; and indeed the authors argue for an account that relies on quite general properties of discourse moves and independently motivated generalizations about ellipsis.

Empirically, perhaps the most striking evidence in favour of Onea & Ott’s analysis—in particular their division of nominal appositions into two classes, only one of which involves a copular structure—comes from the pattern of case assignment to appositional nominals observed in German. As they observe, for reformulating appositions (where the potential question recapitulates the form of the asserted clause) there is apparent case-matching with the anchor.⁹

- (38) *Der Präsident gab die Medaille einer brillanten*
 the president gave the medal a.DAT brilliant.DAT
*Mathematikerin, meiner/*meine Schwester Maria.*
 mathematician my.DAT /*my.NOM sister Maria
 ‘The president gave a brilliant mathematician, my sister Maria, the medal.’

This is predicted by their analysis, given the form of the covert potential question and, consequently, of the elliptical answer:

as “specificational” apposition. For Onea and Ott, on the other hand, what they class as “predicative” appositions would have to include the class of specificational appositions, for the reasons given in what follows.

⁹ Note that most nouns in German do not inflect for case, but case morphology does show up on determiners—including possessive determiners—and adjectives.

- (39) a. *Der Präsident gab die Medaille einer brillanten Mathematikerin.*
 the president gave the medal a.DAT brilliant.DAT mathematician
 ‘The president gave a brilliant mathematician the medal.’ [ASSERTION]
- b. *Welcher brillanten Mathematikerin gab er die Medaille?*
 which.DAT brilliant.DAT mathematician gave he the medal
 ‘Which brilliant mathematician did he give the medal?’
 [POTENTIAL QUESTION]
- c. ~~*Er gab die Medaille*~~ {*meiner / *meine*} *Schwester Maria*
 he gave the medal my.DAT /*my.NOM sister Maria.
 ‘~~He gave my sister Maria the medal.~~’ [FRAGMENT ANSWER]

Strikingly, for predicative appositions (where the potential question has the form of a copular clause), on the other hand, the appositive nominal appears in the nominative:

- (40) *Die Prüfung war sehr leicht für meinen Ehemann, glücklicherweise {ein guter Student / *einen guten Studenten}.*
 the exam was very easy for my.ACC husband fortunately a.NOM good.NOM student.NOM *a.ACC good.ACC student.ACC
 ‘The exam was very easy for my husband, fortunately a good student.’
- (41) a. *Die Prüfung war sehr leicht. für meinen Ehemann*
 the exam was very easy for my.ACC husband
 ‘The exam was very easy for my husband.’ [ASSERTION]
- b. *Was ist dein Ehemann?*
 what is your husband
 ‘What is your husband?’ [POTENTIAL QUESTION]
- c. *Glücklicherweise ~~ist er~~ {ein guter Student / *einen guten Studenten}.*
 fortunately is he a.NOM good.NOM student.NOM *a.ACC good.ACC student.ACC
 ‘Fortunately ~~he is~~ a good student.’ [FRAGMENT ANSWER]

The appearance of nominative case here on the appositive nominal *ein guter Student* ‘a good student’ follows from the Ott & Onea account, given that nominative is the case that would show up in a copular clause:

- (42) *Glücklicherweise ist mein Ehemann {ein guter Student / *einen guten Studenten}.*
 fortunately is my husband a.NOM good.NOM student.NOM / *a.ACC good.ACC student.ACC
 ‘Fortunately my husband is a good student.’

This pattern of case in appositives in German was already noted and analyzed in Heringa’s work, but that analysis required specific resolution rules to capture the

observations; on Ott & Onea’s account no such rules are required, and this is a strong argument in favor of their approach.

However, Heringa’s work includes data concerning case assignment in appositions from other languages, and not all follow the German pattern. In particular, he shows that in Russian, the case on an appositive nominal always matches the case on the anchor, even in the “predicative” type of apposition where in German, as we have just seen, nominative would be required. Thus for example the Russian example (43) corresponds to the German example in (41), but in Russian the case on the appositive ‘a good student’ has to match the case on the anchor ‘my wife’ (genitive here, because of the case assigned by the preposition *dlja* ‘for’).

- (43) *Dlja moej ženy k ščast’ju {priležnoj studentki /*
 for my.GEN wife.GEN to happiness good.GEN student.GEN
**priležnaja studentka}, ekzamen prošel legko*
**good.NOM student.NOM exam went easily*
 ‘For my wife, fortunately a good student, the exam was easy.’

In sharp contrast to German, this is of course not consistent with the nominative case that would appear in the copular sentence that is, by hypothesis, the basis for the fragment answer constituting the apposition. That is, the Russian counterpart of (42) would, like the German example, have nominative on the predicate nominal:

- (44) *K ščastju, moja žena {priležnaja studentka / *priležnoj*
 to happiness my wife good.NOM student.NOM *good.GEN
studentki}.
student.GEN
 ‘Fortunately my wife is a good student.’

For Heringa, it was possible to postulate distinct resolution rules for the two languages, even though these may appear *ad hoc* to a greater or lesser extent. A major strength of the account of Onea & Ott is that it rests on a theory of discourse that aims to rely on independently motivated and quite general constraints on discourse moves, ellipsis, and question-answer congruence. Here, though, this approach makes it harder to see, in principle, how it could be that the relation between fragment answers and apposition might vary from one language to another, as seems to be the case when we contrast Russian to German. I leave this as an open question for further research.

6. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to show that a closer study of nominal appositions can shed some light on long-standing questions concerning the nature of nominal predication. In particular, I have argued that appositions in English lend some additional support to theories that do not attempt to reduce Higgins’ class of specificational copular clauses to inverted predications, but rather assimilate the subject of such clauses to other instances of individual concepts. Appositions may further provide additional evidence for the existence of nominal predications where both of the nominals are—or at least contain—referring expressions (so-called “equatives”). As discussed, however, the force of this latter argument depends on the particular analysis of apposition that is adopted. There

clearly remain many open questions here that are worth pursuing in further research, including the relation between constraints on apposition and those on non-restrictive relatives, and the cross-linguistic variation in the morphosyntax of apposition

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