

Isolated NPs

Arnold M. Zwicky (zwicky@csli.stanford.edu)

- 1.1. Integrated NPs, serving as syntactic arguments, with either referential semantics:

A linguist met me at the door.

I just met a linguist.

- or predicational semantics:

I am a linguist.

Linguist though I am, I can't accept these sentences.

- 1.2. Fragment NPs (Barton 1990, 1998), covertly serving as syntactic arguments:

A. *What's Kim studying?* B: **Linguistics.**

You think Kim is a linguist? **Interesting idea.**

Fact: *Kim is a linguist.*

- 1.3. Isolated NPs, standing alone:

Hey, idiot!

- or interrupting sentences:

*I'm afraid, **you idiot**, that your hair is on fire.*

2. The issue of marginality/peripherality/primitiveness. "It's just sociolinguistics or pragmatics or interaction or social psychology, not anything of syntactic/semantic/lexical interest." (cf. Miller & Weinert 1998)

3. Vocative as a syntactic function, with characteristic semantics. Vocative as one of THE characteristic syntactic functions of NPs (along with Subject, Direct Object, Prepositional Object, etc.).

4. Aim: preliminary stab at making distinctions, surveying facts. Opening things up.

5. Two kinds of uses for isolated NPs: vocative/exclamative, telegraphic

- A. Vocative/exclamative uses, with predication as part of their semantics (Zwicky 1974)

1. Address vocative ("designed... to maintain or emphasize the contact between speaker and addressee"; Schegloff's TERM OF ADDRESS):

*Welcome, **linguists**, to the annual meeting.*

2. Call vocative ("designed to catch the addressee's attention"; Schegloff's SUMMONS):

***Linguists!** Stand on this side of the room.*

3. Epithet exclamative:

You goddam linguist!

4. Dismay exclamative

***Mother!** How can you say that?!*

4. Astonishment exclamative (close to B6 below):

***You linguists!** I just never know what you'll do.*

- B. Telegraphic uses (shading off from fragment NPs)
1. Offer:
Linguists! Get them while they last.
 2. Request:
Two linguists! Over here, and be quick about it.
 3. Hot news (existential/deictic, “just noticed”):
Linguists! Three of them to your left.
 4. Identification of type:
[I point to one plant after another] *Nasturtium. An Indian lime tree. Two kinds of roses.*
[Child points to animal] *Doggie.*
 5. Identification of individual:
[I extend my right hand] *Arnold Zwicky.*
[I gesture towards one person, then another] *Eve Clark... John Beavers.*
[At end of broadcast] *Alistair Cooke, in America.*
 6. Discourse topic (exclamative or not):
Linguists! Don't talk to me about them. (‘As for linguists, don't talk to me about them’)
Hmm, linguists. I wonder why they're so contentious.

5. The two groups taken together allow some NP types -- in particular, bare NPs (singular count NPs lacking a determiner) -- not available for integrated NPs that are referential

5.1. Integrated bare NPs: very restricted

Famous linguist that I am... (Predicative)

Kim is chair of the committee. (Predicative)

distinguished linguist Joan Bresnan (Adnominal Modifier)

**Famous linguist addressed the congress.*

**I just met famous linguist.*

5.2. Ceteris paribus, isolated NPs can be bare

Epithet exclamative: *Linguist!* [spoken in a hiss]

Hot news: *Distinguished linguist! Just to your left.*

5.3. But bare NPs seem not to be available in the discourse topic function

**Linguist! Don't talk to me about him.*

5.4. In a type of metonymy, bare NPs can be pressed into service as ad hoc proper names:

Distinguished Linguist pontificated to First-Year Grad Student.

cf. conversion of (certain) adjectives into ad hoc proper names:

Slim tried to hit on Handsome.

6. Distinguishing the two groups

6.1. Group A uses allow two interpretations for conventionalized epithet nouns like *cocksucker*: a literal interpretation (with an imputation of engaging in fellatio) and an epithet interpretation (serving only as a generic put-down); Group B uses are comfortable only with literal interpretations

6.2. Many pseudo-proper names (*mac, buddy, amigo, ma'am, love, kiddo, toots*) seem to be restricted to vocative uses (and resist exclamative, telegraphic, integrated, and fragment uses); some others (*lady, man*) are understood differently in vocative vs. the other uses, and could be argued to be different lexical items in the two contexts; still others (*Blondie, Stretch*) are generally usable, with no meaning differences

<i>Hey, mac, how do I get to Carnegie Hall?</i>	lady	Blondie
<i>*Mac! How can you talk like that?</i>	lady	Blondie
<i>*Mac took me to Carnegie Hall.</i>	*a lady	Blondie

7. In general, the degree of conventionalization for vocative expressions is very high (Zwicky 1974), with different classes of expressions available as calls, as addresses, as exclamations, in telegraphic uses, and in integrated uses

Cabby, take me to Carnegie Hall. (call)

**I don't think, cabby, that the Lincoln Tunnel is the best way to go to Brooklyn.*
(address)

The cabby drove me to Jersey. (integrated)

You idiot, take me to Carnegie Hall.

I don't think, you idiot, that the Lincoln Tunnel is the best way to go to Brooklyn.

**You idiot drove me to Jersey.*

**I wonder, brother-in-law, if you recall the 1915 flood.*

My brother-in-law recalls the 1915 flood.

The situation is much like subcategorization in syntax: the class of expressions available to fill some slot in a construction is, in part, characterizable by generalizations (in this case, referring to semantics or to syntactic form), but can also involve significant amounts of stipulation, with new types or specific words added, one by one, to the class as a speaker encounters them.

References

- Barton, Ellen L. 1990. Nonsentential constituents: A theory of grammatical structure and pragmatic interpretation. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- 1998. The grammar of telegraphic structures: Sentential and nonsentential derivation. *Journal of English Linguistics* 26.1.37-67.
- Miller, Jim & Regina Weinert. 1998. Spontaneous spoken language: Syntax and discourse. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Schegloff, Emanuel A. 1968. Sequencing in conversational openings. *American Anthropologist* 70.6.1075-95.
- Zwicky, Arnold M. 1974. Hey, what's your name! *CLS* 10.787-801.