

Weak nouns, weak verbs and stereotypicality

Introduction. Weak definites (1), in contrast to regular definites (2), do not refer to uniquely identifiable individuals [Carlson and Sussman, 2005]. Consequently, these constructions allow sloppy readings in VP-ellipsis sentences:

- (1) Lola went to the hospital/the store and Alice did too.
(Lola and Alice could have gone to different hospitals/stores)
- (2) Lola went to #the restaurant/#the farm and Alice did too.
(Lola and Alice must have gone to the same restaurant/farm)

Additionally, weak definites display a series of other peculiar properties. One of them is that they are subject to lexical restrictions. On the one hand, not every noun can occur in a weak definite:

- (3) a. Martha listened to the radio and Alice did too.
b. Martha listened to #the walkie talkie and Alice did too.
- (4) a. Martha took the bus and Alice did too.
b. Martha took #the boat and Alice did too.

On the other hand, the range of verbs and verb-preposition combinations that trigger weak definites is also limited:

- (5) a. Martha listened to the radio and Alice did too.
b. Martha fixed #the radio and Alice did too.
- (6) a. Martha took the bus and Alice did too.
b. Martha drove #the bus and Alice did too.

Aguilar-Guevara and Zwarts [2010] (henceforth A&Z) analyze weak definites as kind-referring expressions which combine with individual-level predicates by means a lexical rule that lifts object-level predicates to kind-level predicates. In the lifted predicates the relation U is incorporated. This relation represent the set of events in which instantiations of kinds are used in ways that are stereotypical for the kinds. The lifted predicates also include the relation R which instantiates kinds. In this analysis, the fact that not every verb-definite combination triggers a weak definite reading is attributed to the absence of a non-empty intersection between the set of events corresponding to the verbs and the set of events corresponding to U .

In this talk, I examine in more detail the lexical meaning of the nouns that head weak definites (henceforth *weak nouns*) and the verbs and verb-preposition combinations that can govern them (henceforth *weak verbs*). My aim is to identify a common feature to all the members of each category, which enables us to better understand the restrictions illustrated in (3)-(6) and thus motivate empirically the way A&Z account for these restrictions. The talk is organized in four parts.

Part 1 examines the meaning of weak nouns. To do so, I make de use of basic notions of the Generative Lexicon Theory [Pustejovsky, 1991, 1995], a framework that represents the lexical meaning of words by means of structures comprising four levels of representation. One of these levels is the Qualia Structure, which in turn is composed of four components. One of these components is the Telic Role, which indicates the purpose

of functional objects. I draw Generalization 1, which states that the common property to all weak nouns is that they designate objects associated with a Telic role. This generalization is accurate as it covers all the instances of weak nouns including apparent counterexamples such as nouns that name natural objects and professions. At the same time, this generalization is weak as not every noun naming a functional object can occur in a weak definite.

Part 2 discusses the lexical properties of weak verbs. I draw Generalization 2, which states that the property these verbs have in common is that they support the function of the objects designated by the weak nouns with which they combine. This generalization, although accurate, also overgenerates as not every verb that is compatible with the function of an object can be a weak verb.

Part 3 builds on Generalization 1 and 2 by discussing the effects of stereotypicality on the emergence of weak readings. I formulate two more generalizations. Generalization 3 states that weak nouns designate functional objects but that are associated with stereotypical usages. Generalization 4 states that weak verbs designate activities that support these usages. These generalizations are not only empirically optimal as they cover almost all and only weak nouns and verbs. Crucially, they motivate A&Z's postulation of the *U* relation.

Part 3 presents an experiment that tested the stability of typical purposes related to weak and regular nouns in order to substantiate Generalization 3 and thus support the influence of stereotypicality on the emergence of weak readings. Subjects were presented with a list of weak and regular nouns referring to a location and asked to provide as many reasons as they could think of why someone would go to the location. Based on overall frequency, the most recurring purposes corresponding to each noun were identified. Then statistical tests were applied to measure the strength of this recurrence. The results suggest that the purposes corresponding to weak nouns are significantly more recurrent than those invoked by regular nouns. In that sense, these purposes can be considered stereotypical. Crucially, as the nouns were presented in their bare form, the results also suggest that the difference between weak and regular nouns is independent of any embedding DP and of any governing verb.

Part 4 discusses the question whether weak nouns and verbs constitute classes of words lexically defined. The conclusion about weak verbs is that, if their enriched kind-level denotation is the result of the application of a lexical rule, it is not necessary to assume that these verbs constitute a lexical class. In contrast, the conclusion about weak nouns is that they do constitute a class whose members' lexical meaning specifies the association with SUs.

References

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