

RIGHT-DISLOCATION, “DISLOCATION-TO-THE-RIGHT” AND OTHER RELATED ISSUES¹

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The aim of this paper is to refute present formal analyses of the phenomenon of right-dislocation, and to defend the view that right-dislocation is merely a short-distance referential relationship in discourse. It follows from this that only pragmatic / semantic factors (as opposed to structural ones) should be invoked to account for the peculiarities of this construction type. It also follows that right-dislocation should not be kept apart from the grammatical description of other “detached” NPs.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to refute a number of assumptions that are usually made in connection with so-called right-dislocation (henceforth also R-d). Specifically, mainly three assumptions will be called into question here. The first is the belief that R-d is some kind of appositive structure. The second is the view that R-d is a constituent which is base-generated as an external expansion of S in a non-argument position inside the superordinate S. The third is the presupposition that R-d constitutes a self-contained, discrete area of the grammar, in the sense that it can be defined in its own terms, without reference to other areas.

Against these three assumptions, it will be proposed here: 1. that R-d is not adequately accounted for by either the appositive theory or the external expansion theory; 2. that R-d should not be kept apart from the grammatical description of other “detached” NPs; and 3. that all dislocated NPs are best explained by reference to discourse principles, rather than by reference to sentential grammar. In short, we will take the view that R-d is merely a short-distance referential relationship in discourse, and that, as such, only pragmatic/semantic factors (as opposed to structural ones) should be invoked to account for it.

DESCRIPTION

The following two italicised examples, taken from Givón (1993, 213-4), illustrate the pattern under scrutiny:

1. Subject:

CONTEX: ... We called him 'Cotton'. He was always a white-headed little kid, and [is] still pretty much white-headed and all curly-headed, y'know.

R-D: He lives in California, *Ol' Cotton-Ground*. But I ...

2. Direct object:

CONTEX: ... and [my Dad] looked down there and one of the ol' mares come in a-leading about, oh I imagine about fifteen, twenty head of horses, y'know,

R-D: she brought them back, yeah, *some of those ol' mares*.²

It will be seen that R-d involves NPs which appear to the right of sentences, separated off from them by strong intonation breaks. Typically, a dislocated NP co-refers with an anaphoric pronoun which performs an ordinary role inside the sentence structure. R-d is very much a feature of the informal spoken register. In this it performs two main communicative jobs. On the one hand, it functions as an after-thought or repair device whereby the referential information coded in the proform is eventually re-coded as a full NP for reasons of clarification. On the other, it is, as Givón points out, a "chain-final topic-marking device", by which is meant a device which signals "the end of a thematic chain" and thus alerts "the hearer to the likelihood of topic-switching in the next clause" (p. 215).

In what follows we will refer to the dislocated element as the DE and to the pronominal constituent as the CC, or copied constituent.

R-D AS APPPOSITION

Although it is by no means easy to delineate the defining properties of apposition (Bitea 1977; Koktová 1985; Fuentes Rodríguez 1989), this term has been used in the tradition to designate at least central cases as (3) and (4) below:

(3) *The president of the company, Mary Smith*, resigned yesterday.

(4) Jean Fardulli's Blue Angel is the first top local club to import *that crazy new dance, the Twist*.³

It will be seen that constructions such as (3) and (4) resemble R-ds in a number of respects. In the first place, they both involve co-referential NPs. In the second place, the two members of each pattern perform the same semantic role. Thus, in (1), an instance of R-d, both the proform *he* and the dislocated NP *Ol' Cotton Ground* share an identical semantic function relative to the predication expressed by *live*. That is, both constitute a single semantic argument of that predication. The same can be said

of the apposition in (3), where, by virtue of their co-referentiality, both *the president of the company* and *Mary Smith* share the same notional role relative to resigned. Thirdly, both R-ds and canonical appositions are typically identificational structures, in the sense that they are often used to identify referents. Thus, just like in (2), for instance, *some of those ol' mares* identifies the previous them, so in (4) the *twist* identifies *that crazy new dance*. It is for these reasons that a number of authors have chosen to interpret R-ds as appositive structures. Notable among these are Roberts (1966, 256), Bitea (1977, 469 ff.), Quirk et al. (1985, 1310), and Meyer (1992, 20 ff.).

However, the appositive theory of R-d rests only on notional criteria, such as those mentioned above. From a structural point of view, the similarities between R-d and central cases of apposition would appear to vanish as soon as traditional and well-established notions of phrase-structure are taken into account. Apposition is after all a phrase-structure notion based on the functional equivalence existing between the two appositive members. Since functional equivalence is defined in terms of privileges of occurrence in the superordinate structure, it is, in principle, easy to determine whether a given construction is or is not apposition. Notice in this respect that (3) and (4) are canonical appositions since in both constructions the two members have the same privileges of occurrence:

- (3) *The president of the company, Mary Smith*, resigned yesterday.
- (3b) *The president of the company* resigned yesterday.
- (3c) *Mary Smith* resigned yesterday.
- (3d) *Mary Smith, the president of the company*, resigned yesterday.

- (4) Jean Fardulli's Blue Angel is the first top local club to import *that crazy new dance, the Twist*.
- (4b) Jean Fardulli's Blue Angel is the first top local club to import *that crazy new dance*.
- (4c) Jean Fardulli's Blue Angel is the first top local club to import *the Twist*.
- (4d) Jean Fardulli's Blue Angel is the first top local club to import *the Twist, that crazy new dance*.

Conversely, R-ds such as (1) and (2) above appear to exhibit a markedly different behaviour under the tests of omission and interchangeability, which seek to reveal syntactic independence:

- (1) *He* lives in California, *Ol' Cotton-Ground*.
- (1b) *He* lives in California.
- (1c) **lives* in California, *Ol' Cotton-Ground*.
- (1d) **Ol' Cotton-Ground* lives in California, *he*.

- (2a) She brought *them* back the other day in Jim's truck, yeah, *some of those ol' mares*.⁴
- (2b) She brought *them* back the other day in Jim's truck, yeah.
- (2c) *She brought back the other day in Jim's truck, yeah, *some of those ol' mares*.
- (2d) *She brought back the other day in Jim's truck *some of those ol' mares, yeah, them*.

Although the tests speak for themselves, by observing the ungrammaticality of the (c) and (d) sequences above we may gain some valuable insight into the nature of R-d. Notice from the (b) versions that the DE is completely dispensable. That is, it can always be left out without damaging the acceptability of the preceding sentence. By contrast, the proform, a mere copied constituent, is non-dispensable. Thus, if left out, the sentence becomes ungrammatical, as the (c) versions demonstrate. This asymmetry in the privileges of occurrence of the two NPs follows from the intuitively clear fact that it is only the CC, but not the DE, that is effectively integrated in the structure of the sentence. This, in spite of the fact that the communicative force of the utterance rests more on the adequate interpretation of the full dislocated NP than on that of the co-referential proform.

Similar observations can be made in connection with the (d) versions. Notice that, as is evident from them, the interchangeability of the two units of a dislocated construction is not possible because its effect is to leave a pronominal constituent stranded after a strong intonation break. Thus stranded, and isolated from the preceding sentence, the proform is interpreted as fulfilling no role. This is because, on the one hand, the reference it carries is already made explicit by the previous full NP. And, on the other hand, because interchangeability leaves a unit with no syntactic independence in a position where it cannot be assigned a function in a superordinate structure. In short, not being able to clarify anything, and without a function to perform, the proform is felt to be an ungrammatical dislocation (but see below).

Notice further that if we again apply the omission test to the two units of the interchanged version of (1), that is, to the two units of (1d), yielding (1e) and (1f):

- (1e) *Ol' Cotton-Ground* lives in California.
 (1d) *lives in California, *he*,

the results bear our previous remark that only the element that appears inside the sentence, carrying out an ordinary role in it, is fully necessary ((1e)). As before, the omission of the dislocated constituent does not seem to condition the acceptability of the preceding clause.

It follows from the logic of phrase-structure grammar that the case for the appositive interpretation of R-d has little to commend itself. Far from being equivalent in any structurally relevant sense, the units making up the dislocated construction appear to differ in their syntactic behaviour in important ways. *In so far as is evident from the above simple tests*, only the copied constituent can be assigned a function inside the sentence structure (that of subject in (1) and object in (2)). As for the co-referential dislocated element, it is not immediately clear that it has a grammatical function to perform inside the sentence to which it refers.

DISLOCATIONS-TO-THE RIGHT

It will have been noticed that our exposition of the facts so far is somewhat oversimplified. In order to do away with such oversimplification, a terminological distinction seems in order at this point. In what follows we will differentiate between

right-dislocation proper, as described in section 1, and “dislocation-to-the-right” (henceforth also D-to-R). The basis for the distinction is the fact that R-d involves a proform whereas D-to-R does not. (5) and (6) below illustrate the contrast:

- (5) *He* is a nice fellow, *Jan*.
 (6) *The doctor* is a nice fellow, *Jan*.⁵

R-d and D-to-R are in fact the same phenomenon, but since the tradition has established the term right-dislocation for structures containing proforms only, we have chosen to coin a new term for the pattern illustrated by (6), in which a full dislocated NP refers back to another full NP. We will also use the generic expression RIGHT DETACHMENT for any form of detached expansion to the right, regardless of the form of its antecedent. Despite the different labels it nevertheless appears obvious that whatever the structural relationship existing between the units in R-d, the same relationship should be posited for the units in D-to-R.

However, once we broaden the context of the present discussion by introducing D-to-Rs in it, our previous comments on the phrase structure description of dislocated constituents need to be reconsidered. The reason is that the two NPs in D-to-Rs may be fully interchangeable, which means that only omission of the first (which is no longer a copied constituent) stands in the way of an appositive analysis of dislocation:

- (6) *The doctor* is a nice fellow, *Jan*.
 (6b) *The doctor* is a nice fellow.
 (6c) **is* a nice fellow, *Jan*.
 (6d) *Jan* is a nice fellow, *the doctor*.

As a matter of fact, it is now evident that the failure of the R-d in (1) above to allow interchangeability need not have much to do with the grammar (and the structure) of RIGHT DETACHMENT in general. Rather, it may have more to do with the grammar of proforms in particular. In short, the reason why (1d) above is unacceptable is that the proform appears separated from the rest right after its reference has been clearly specified by the full NP. This redundancy expressed by the combination NP1 + proform1, is not acceptable even in canonical appositions:

- (3e) **The president of the company, she*, resigned yesterday. (contrast
 (3f) *She, the president of the company*, resigned yesterday.)

Since the presence of the pronominal constituent is not necessary in D-to-Rs, and since the failure of that constituent to appear stranded in R-ds can be accounted for on independent grounds, it may be argued that there may be a case for analysing dislocation in general as an appositive structure after all (although omission of the first constituent continues to be a problem).

DETACHED NPS

The gist of our discussion so far thus boils down to the question of whether the following two schemas are structurally identical:⁶

- | | | | | | |
|----------------------|------------------|---|---|-----|------------------|
| (7) NP1 ¹ | X | Y | Z | /// | NP2 ¹ |
| (8) NP1 ¹ | NP2 ¹ | X | Y | Z | |

For (7) and (8) to be structurally identical, two conditions should be met. First, the meaning conveyed by the two schemas ought to be exactly the same. Second, for any string of the form of (7) it should be possible to move NP2 out of its displaced position in the overall structure and juxtapose it to NP1 with no change of meaning in the resultant string. The satisfaction of these two conditions appears to be confirmed by (6) and (6e):

- (6) *The doctor* is a nice fellow, *Jan*.
 (6e) *The doctor, Jan*, is a nice fellow.

as well as by many other examples:

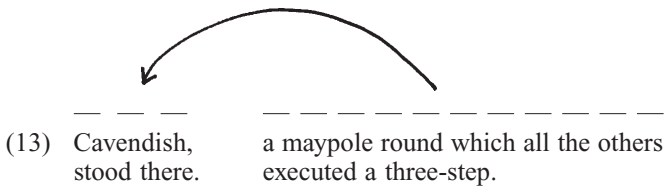
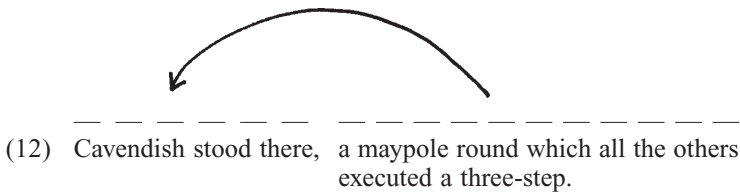
- (9a) *His brother* showed no enthusiasm, *Keith*.
 (9b) *His brother, Keith*, showed no enthusiasm.
 (10) *The manager* got very upset, *Mr Togeby*.
 (10b) *The manager, Mr Togeby*, got very upset.

However, there is evidence that the aforementioned movement operation is far from being such a regular process as the previous examples suggest. The fact is that movement of NP2 from its dislocated position to a position adjacent to NP1 often brings about a change of meaning. This circumstance will naturally prevent us from treating schemas (7) and (8) above as essentially alike. Consider the movement in question in the transition from (11a) to (11b) below:⁷

- (11a) *Cavendish* stood there, *a maypole round which all the others executed a three-step*.
 (11b) ? *Cavendish, a maypole round which all the others executed a three-step*, stood there.

Note that (11a) and (11b) do not mean exactly the same. In (11b), *Cavendish*, who is defined as *a maypole round which all the others executed a three-step*, is said to stand at a certain place. In (11a), by contrast, *Cavendish* is defined as *a maypole round which all the others executed a three-step* BY VIRTUE OF THE WAY IN WHICH he stands at a certain place. (11b) is odd; (11a) is perfectly natural. This difference in the interpretation of the two constructions is related to the fact that the detached phrase (*a maypole round which ...*) “picks up” elements of meaning of the preceding constituents for its

interpretation. That is, the difference is dependent on which elements are within the scope of interpretation of the detached phrase. The scope of interpretation is defined in terms of precedence. Thus, in (11b) only *Cavendish* occurs before the detached phrase. Therefore, these two phrases (*Cavendish* and *a maypole ...*) are equated, yielding the rather strange reading: *Cavendish is/resembles a maypole ...* In (11a), however, not only *Cavendish* but the whole predication (*Cavendish stood there*) occurs before the detached phrase. So this time the metaphorical equation is successfully established between the whole predication and the phrase: *Cavendish' standing there is/resembles a maypole ...* In short, coming back to schemas (7) and (8), the difference between the two constructions is that NP2 (*a maypole round which ...*) refers only to NP1 in (11b) but to NP1 + X Y Z in (11a), as illustrated in (12) and (13):



The contrast between (11a) and (11b) therefore shows that the dislocated position is relevant in determining the meaning of co-referential NPs. However, position does not tell the entire picture, for, after all, in (6) above, *the doctor is a nice fellow, Jan*, no perceptible change of meaning is brought about when NP2 is moved out of its dislocated place in the structure to a place contiguous with NP1 (yielding (6e), *the doctor, Jan, is a nice fellow*). Since both pairs of constructions, (6)-(6e) and (11a)-(11b), appear to share an identical structure (both contain detached NPs), the difference between them cannot be structural, that is, formal. It must therefore be semantic in nature. Notice in this respect that the meaning relationship of the two NPs of (6) is inherently identificational, whereas that of (11a) is rather descriptive or metaphorical. Typically, a speaker of English would use the dislocation in (6) to identify a referent in the immediately preceding discourse, probably for reasons of clarification. (11e), however, would typically be uttered or written out of a desire to endow an *unambiguous* referent with certain metaphorical characteristics. The semantic difference between them can be brought out by inserting so-called appositive markers before the dislocated elements. Notice that only (6), the identificational structure, accepts them naturally:

(6f) *The doctor is a nice fellow, y'know, Jan.*
The doctor is a nice fellow, I mean, Jan.

(11c) ? *Cavendish stood there, y' know/I mean, a maypole round which all the others executed a three-step.*

That the key to interpreting dislocated structures is not formal but semantic in nature is also evident from the following examples:

(14) *Rottemberg cried in agony, a long piercing cry that made everyone shiver.*

(15) *Then they drew the curtains, the fact that indicated that this one was for real.*

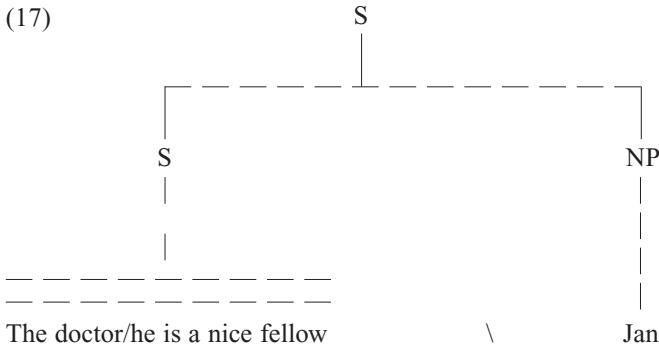
(16) *Roxanne decided to stay in Malibu with Ricky Austin, a combination that promises to cause her some trouble.*

Notice that all the above examples constitute the same SYNTACTIC pattern. In all of them, a NP appears detached from a preceding clause to which it refers backwards. However, in contrast with (6), where the DE “picks up” only one NP in the preceding clause, and with (11a), where the DE “picks up” the entire preceding clause, in (14) the DE affects the preceding verb only, in (15) it affects the whole VP, and in (16) it refers to two independent NPs inside S. Since the position of the dislocated element remains the same for all cases, it appears reasonable to suggest that the relationship between this element and its antecedent is fundamentally *interpretive*, or, in other words, semantic. Were the dislocated element linked to the preceding clause in a syntactic, formal way, we should not expect a different pairing between that element and a clause constituent for every new construction. The varying scopes of interpretation of these detached NPs thus strongly indicate that, once the clause is finished, the DE merely establishes referential ties with it, or with parts of it. The scope of these ties appears to depend only on the conditions of congruence of the DE relative to the meaning of the preceding clause.

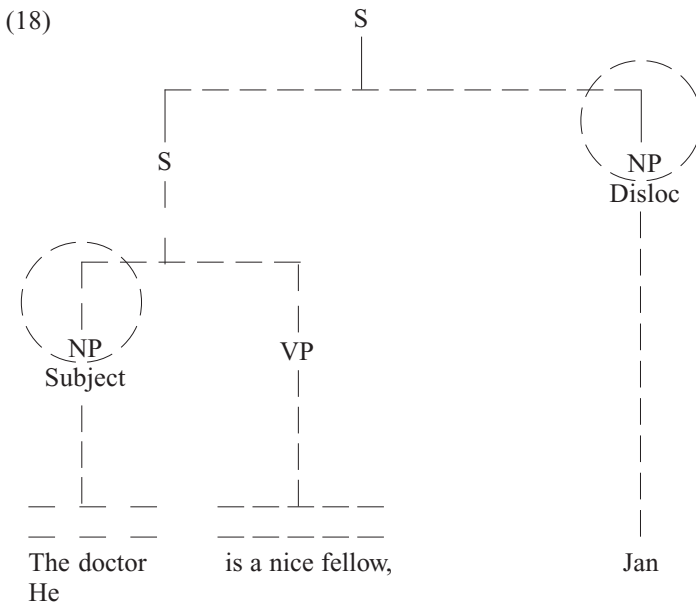
THE EXTERNAL EXPANSION THEORY

The discourse-oriented interpretation of right-dislocation just outlined contrasts with the external expansion theory, to which we briefly turn now.

Although the study of R-d has not received much attention within the generative framework, it is often assumed that right-dislocation involves the same structure as left-dislocation (Emonds (1976, 32 ff.), Radford (1988, 530 ff.)). In order to distinguish dislocated constructions in general from topicalization structures, Radford (op. cit.) suggests that both right- and left-dislocations be analysed as base-generated external expansions of a lower S inside the superordinate S.⁸ This expansion takes place in a non-argument position in the higher sentence structure. Simplifying a little, a structure of the type alluded to here might be represented as follows:



The external expansion theory offers a much better formalization of the syntax of dislocation than the notional appositive theory. This is because it assigns to the two co-referential NPs two different levels in the hierarchical structure of S, instead of the same one. This analysis agrees with the differences in the behaviour of the two NPs pointed out in section 3. PM (18) below brings out the hierarchical distinction highlighted by the theory:



However, the external expansion theory cannot help running up against difficulties. These stem mainly from the fact that the theory takes the status of dislocated strings as sentence constituents for granted. For this reason we will reject it as a possible analysis of right-dislocation and RIGHT DETACHMENT in general.

First and foremost among the difficulties that the theory encounters is the fact that it locates the DE as a sister of S for all cases of dislocation. In this configuration, the DE always refers to an entire S, something which we have seen not to be true. Thus, it is obvious from (9)-(16) above that the DE may refer to an entire S on some occasions, to an NP/VP/V inside S on other occasions, and even to several NPs of S at the same time on still other occasions. It would therefore be unwise to impose one configuration for right-dislocation in general and then account for the cases that this configuration does not cover by means of an *ad hoc* semantic restriction on the scope of the DE. If, as suggested in section 5, no structural connection between the DE and the clause is posited, then we can account for the different scope of the DE in systematically semantic terms. This of course implies abjuring the notion of sentence and embracing that of discourse in the analysis of right-dislocation.


A second reason why the sentence-based external expansion theory must be rejected is the fact that, as Quirk et al. (1985, 1310) point out, in very informal style the operator is often included in the dislocation:⁹


(19) It went on far too long, *your game did*.

(20) *He's* a complete idiot, *John is*.

This suggests that the so-called dislocation is processed as an independent clause and that this clause (or whatever the detached string is when there is no verb present) is merely juxtaposed to the preceding S, without being a member of that S. Again, this independence can be adequately accounted for if one takes the DE to be merely discourse-linked to S.

In the third place, there is also some phonological evidence for the discourse theory and against the external expansion interpretation. As Bowers (1981, 273) points out, “dislocated constituents have the falling intonation contour that is typically assigned to whole sentences”. This can be noticed if we compare, as Bowers does, the intonation of a dislocated sentence with that of, for instance, a sentence containing a topicalised constituent. The difference might be schematized as follows:

(21)  *That dog* I can't control any more.

(22)  I can't control any more, *That dog*.

But over and above the aforementioned arguments, there is something that casts the deepest doubts upon the external expansion theory, or upon any other sentence-based theory of dislocation for that matter: namely, the fact that there is no positive evidence for constituent structure in these theories. A sentence is a tight formal concept defined in terms of specific hierarchical structures, which in turn determine the existence of specific grammatical functions. Normally, there is plenty of evidence to prove that a certain constituent functions at a higher or a lower level inside the sentence structure, that it is a subject or an object, a complement or an adjunct, and so on and so forth. In dislocated structures, however, there is nothing of the sort. All there is is a semantic relationship of co-reference between a constituent inside a sentence and a NP which appears detached from that sentence after strong intonation breaks. It is quite easy to assign a specific slot in the S constituent structure to the pronominal copy, the CC, as (1a/d)-(2a/d) demonstrate. It is therefore also quite easy to specify the grammatical function of this constituent (subject and object in (1) and (2) respectively). Both constituency and function therefore indicate that the CC is effectively a part of S. But there is no way of assigning either a constituent structure or a grammatical function to the DE because this is appended to sentences which are already complete. Indeed, the only meaningful statement one can make about right-dislocation is that it is a short-distance referential relationship in discourse.

EPILOGUE: JUXTAPOSITION AND PRAGMATICS

Ultimately, from a PURELY SYNTACTIC point of view, nothing distinguishes detached phrases such as (5)-(6) and (23):

- (5) *He* is a nice fellow, Jan.
- (6) *The doctor* is a nice fellow, Jan.
- (23) Jan just stood there, *a maypole round which all the others executed a three-step*.

from other apparently dissimilar constructions such as (24)-(25):

- (24) Jan just stands there all the time, and Mary!
- (25) Jan stood there all the time, amazing!

Note that all of the above examples are characterised by being composed of a complete, fully independent clause followed by a detached element that refers back to it in various ways. The important aspect to be emphasized here is that the nature of the connection between the detached element and the clause in all cases is not formal, but semantic/pragmatic. Interestingly enough, this is true even for instances such as (24), whose detached string contains a formal, structural connector *par excellence* (the coordinator *and*). In strictly formal terms, (24) ought to be an ungrammatical coordinated structure because the verb is in the singular. However, speakers of English produce strings like (24) in their spontaneous, everyday informal speech. This means that there is of course nothing wrong with these strings.

What is relevant about them is that, once the clause is finished, the appended coordination is established, so to speak, “ad sensum”. Therefore, the usual formal requirements (such as agreement with the predicator) need not be observed in order for such strings to make perfect sense.

The moral to be drawn from all these distinctly informal examples is that R-d, D-to-R, and RIGHT DETACHMENT in general constitute typically discourse phenomena which are not subject to sentence-building constraints. In essence, they all involve absence of “solid” constituent structure, or, in other words, absence of formal linkage. From a PURELY SYNTACTIC point of view, it is indeed very difficult, to say the least, to see more than mere juxtaposition in them. Owing to this juxtaposition, or physical proximity, as Larsen Pehrzon (1993, 120) puts it, “the reader is forced to accept some *conceptual* proximity and to activate *interpretive* strategies in order to find out or create *meaning relations* that are opaque” (emphasis added).¹⁰ Thus, just as in (25) above, for instance, we infer that *amazing* refers to *Jan stood there all the time*, and not to, say, the fact that the moon is not visible in daylight, so in (6), for instance, we deduce that *Jan* refers to *the doctor* (whom in the context we are all supposed to know) and not to, say, a surgeon who lives in Singapore.

One does not need rigid syntactic ties to establish obvious referential relationships of this kind. All one needs is, roughly, semantic congruence and communicative economy. If this fact is recognised, then we are in a position to have a better understanding of the nature of RIGHT DETACHMENT in general, including right-dislocation. In that case, we would also be in a position to tighten the concept of true syntactic structure by relegating it to genuine structural togetherness.

Notes

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2. Here and in what follows the two co-referential NPs are marked in italics.
3. (3) and (4) are taken from Meyer (1992, 5, 41).
4. Constituents are added to the original version of (2) so that the omission test does not yield a falsified result in (2c).
5. It can hardly be overemphasized that the acceptability of these utterances depends crucially on their oral nature.
6. As is customary, indices indicate co-referentiality. X, Y and Z stand for other members of the sentence, apart from the two NPs.
7. (11a) is taken from Meyer (1992, 38), where it is given an appositive analysis.
8. In the generative literature, a great deal of attention has been paid to assigning two distinct positions within the structure of S to left-dislocations and topicalizations. The essence of the discussion has very much to do with which of these two construction types occupies either the Comp or the Topic position of S (Chomsky 1977; Rivero 1980; Baltin 1982; Greenberg 1984). This is a discussion that need not detain us here. Besides, the conclusions reached in the analysis of left-dislocation have in fact rarely been applied to R-d.
9. (19) and (20) are Quirk et al.’s own examples.
10. Note also her words: “... physical proximity is iconically related to semantic proximity or mutual relevance” (p. 117).

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