

Similarities and Differences between the Close and Loose Apposition in English*

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Kim, Jong-Bok 2014. Similarities and Differences between the Close and Loose Apposition in English. *English Language and Linguistics* 20.3, 79-98. English introduces two different types of nominal apposition: close and loose apposition. These two types of apposition share many grammatical properties, but at the same time behave differently in many respects. The loose apposition construction is a head-modifier structure in which the appositive, functioning as a modifier, also evokes an independent message linked to the conversational implicature. Meanwhile, the close apposition construction is a modifier-head structure in which the head is a proper noun requiring a definite specifier. This paper shows that the grammatical similarities and differences between these two can be followed from a Construction Grammar view.

Key words: loose apposition, close apposition, Construction Grammar, conversational implicature

1. Introduction

English employs two different types of apposition, close and loose apposition, as illustrated in the following:

- (1) a. The writer, Hemingway, is one of the most influential writers of the 20th century.
- b. The writer Hemingway is one of the most influential writers of the 20th century.

Both examples here have two constituents: anchor *the writer* and appositive *Hemingway*, but each displays different grammatical properties. The presence of

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commas differentiates the two, eventually leading to a difference in intonation. That is, unlike the appositive of the close AC (apposition construction), that of loose AC in (1a) functions as a phonologically-isolated phrase. A more clear difference comes from meaning. The semantic contribution is also different even though the appositive in both cases takes the anchor as its argument to return a proposition: the close AC in (1b) suggests that there are several writers, and the speaker picks out the one called Hemingway and this writer is one of the most influential writers. Meanwhile, the loose AC in (1a) refers to only one writer, adding information about him (see Quirk et al. 1985, Acuña-Farifña 1999, 2009, Huddleston and Pullum 2002).

As such the two types of apposition display quite different semantic properties even though they are similar in terms of syntax. In this paper, we look into the properties of these two different types of apposition, while discussing their similarities as well as differences. We then offer a construction-based syntactic analysis that can account for the behavior of these two constructions.

2. On the Structure of the Loose Apposition

The loose AC construction appears to be a type of coordination in the sense that it juxtaposes two nominal expressions. However, we can observe that it displays both coordination and subordination properties. The loose AC behaves like a coordination in the sense that both the anchor and the appositive are categorically identical, referring to the same individual. It is like a subordination in the sense that the appositive is optional (Keizer 2005, Heringa 2011, Kim 2012). For example, consider the following:

- (2) a. He was one of the few that told the president, Johnson, to get out of Vietnam.
 b. He was one of the few that told the president to get out of Vietnam.
 c. He was one of the few that told Johnson to get out of Vietnam.

The anchor *the president* and the appositive *Johnson* refer to the same individual, as seen from the fact that (2b) and (2c) have the same truth value. Either the

anchor or the appositive can be optional, without affecting the grammaticality as seen from (2b) and (2c).

The possibility of having more than one appositive also supports the coordination-like properties (see Quirk et al. 1985: 1306):

- (3) They returned to their birthplace, their place of residence, the country of which they were citizens.

In addition, note that the apposition marker, just like coordinators, forms a constituent with the appositive (Keizer 2005, Heringa 2011):

- (4) a. People were willing to trade loyalty to a large institution, namely a company, in exchange for the security they got in return.
b. *People were willing to trade loyalty to a large institution, a company, namely in exchange for the security they got in return.

Since the coordinators form a constituent with the following conjunct, as illustrated in (4b), the apposition marker cannot be separated from the apposition in extraposition.

Even though the loose AC displays many coordination-like properties in terms of syntax, the meaning relation between the anchor and the appositive does not, which we have already noticed in the previous section (Huddleston and Pullum 2002, Heringa 2011) Unlike typical loose ACs in which both the anchor and the appositive are categorically and referentially identical, a closer look shows that they can be in non-equivalent relations:

- (5) a. But in the 1830s, Dr. Thomas Arnold, Headmaster of Rugby School, saw a different of sport.
b. *But in the 1830s, Headmaster of Rugby School saw a different of sport.

As in (5a), the appositive can be a bare nominal, which cannot be referential. This nonreferential property is evidenced by (5b) where the bare nominal is in the subject position. In addition, the omission possibility does not hold when the appositive is preceded by an adverbial expression:

- (6) a. Mary, back then a little girl, impressed the audience.
 b. *Back then a little girl impressed the audience.

The omission of the anchor will then leave the subject preceded by an adverbial expression as in (6b). This implies that the combination of the anchor and appositive may not be a coordination.

In terms of meaning, the appositive of the loose AC introduces the second message, describing a proposition like the [anchor] is [apposition] (Quirk et al. 1995, Huddelston and Pullum 2002, Heringa 2011, Kim 2012). Consider the following example:

- (7) Dr. William, a consultant from Seoul, is to head the new unit.

The sentence here can induce both of the following messages, given that the appositive induces a copula-relation with the anchor:

- (8) a. Dr. William is a consultant from Seoul.
 b. Dr. William is to head a new unit.

Mikkelsen (2011) and others have observed that the copula relations can be classified into three different types: predicative, equative, and specificational. We can observe these three different semantic relations in the loose AC too:

- (9) a. The house, an imposing building, dominates the street. (predicative)
 b. I did not have a sexual affair with that woman, Monica Lewinsky.
 (equative)
 c. The winner of the game, Mary, is my best friend. (specificational)

The anchor is characterized by the appositive giving some characteristics of the individual referred by the anchor. The predicative use in (9a) denotes a property of the anchor *the house* as seen from the fact that the content of the appositive can be paraphrased as *the house is an imposing building*. The appositive in an equivalence (or identificational) relation allows the insertion of an expression like *that is* (to say) representing a naming relation. In the specificational use in (9c), the anchor *the winner of the game* can set up a variable

(who is the winner of the game) and the appositive *Mary* specifies the value of this variable. What we can observe here is that the loose AC displays a full range of copular semantic relations, not just a modification or subordination relation.

Another intriguing semantic property is that the second message (proposition) induced by the appositive is semantically independent of the host clause (Potts 2007). That is, the truth value of the two messages (8a) and (8b) is independent (Potts 2005, Heringa 2011). That is, the whole utterance in (7) is false if the main proposition in (8a) is false. However, even if the proposition (8b), evoked by the appositive, is false, the main proposition still can be true or false. This is evidenced by the possibility of having an exchange of dialogue after (7):

(10) Well yes, but he is not a consultant, but a supervisor from Seoul.

Evidence for the appositive of the loose AC's introducing an independent proposition can also be found from the presence of a sentential adverb (Heringa 2011):

- (11) a. Normal Jones, then a student, wrote several bestsellers.
b. This book, frankly not my favorite one, won a prize.
c. They elected as chairman Martin Jones, also a Cambridge graduate.

Adverbs like these cannot occur in non-sentential environments, implying that the appositive induces a propositional meaning.

This semantic difference between the two can be noted when interacting with negation:

- (12) A: John thinks that Sofia said that Jane, a distinguished writer, is an imposter.
B: No, that's not true.

In this case, the pronoun *that* may refer to any proposition in A's turn, but the autonomous predication that Jane is a distinguished writer is not affected by the negation at all. In a similar manner, Hannay and Keizer (2005) note that the loose

AC behaves like a ‘holophrase’ in that sense that it forms an autonomous unit in discourse (see also Doron 1998, Potts 2005, 2007):

- (13) a. Midland, once the greatest bank in the world, has forfeited its dependence.
 b. What will Mary, John’s wife, say when she hears about this?
 c. Don’t forget to invite Sue, Peter’s brother, to the party!

The presence of *once* means the appositive is a full proposition in (13a). In (13b) and (13c), the illocutionary force is different: the matrix clause is interrogative and imperative but the appositive predication is all declaratives. The second message evoked by the appositive is thus a type of a conventional implicature (CI), different from an at-issue meaning. As suggested by Potts (2005), CIs are parts of the conventional, lexical meaning of words, but are logically and compositionally independent of what is ‘said’, i.e., the at-issue entailments. In the loose AC context, the anchor thus represents an at-issue meaning while the appositive evokes a CI meaning.

Considering all these syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic properties, following Kim (2012), we assume that the English loose AC (*loose-ac-cx*) is a subtype of the superconstruction *hd-mod-cx* as well as the *coordination-cx*.¹ The loose AC thus inherits properties from both coordination and modification. The coordination properties are reflected in its syntactic structure while the subordination properties ensure that the second appositive is subordinated to the anchor. In addition to these inherited properties, the construction has its own properties with respect to the semantic and pragmatic properties, as given in Figure 1.2

¹ For the inheritance network of constructions in the Construction Grammar, see Goldberg (2006), Kim (2012), Sag (2012).

² The constructional properties of *coordination-cx* and *subordination-cx* follow traditional assumptions in that the former coordinates two identical categories while the latter consists of a head and a modifying clause. We leave out detailed discussion here for space reason.

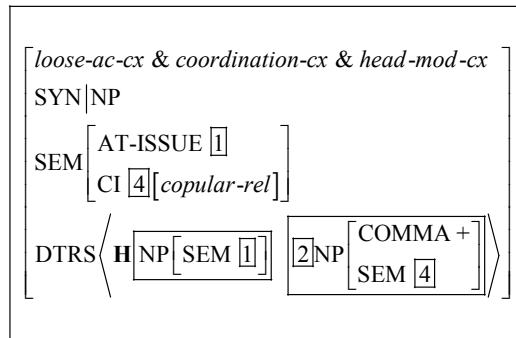
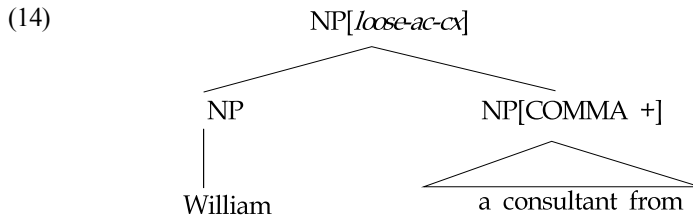


Figure 1: English Loose Apposition Construction

As specified in Figure 1, in terms of syntax, the construction has two immediate daughters, ensuring that the anchor and the appositive are in the adjacent position. This will generate a structure like (14).³



The structure shows us that the appositive is right-adjoined to the anchor, forming a constituent with it. This will block us from generating examples in which the two units of the loose AC are non-adjacent or the two do not form a constituent:

- (15) a. Peter, the chair of the Republican Party, has continuously pointed out the problem.
- b. *Peter has, the chair of the Republican Party, pointed out the problem.

Since the construction inherits coordination properties in terms of syntax, we can expect that a syntactic process cannot be applied only to one of the two:

³ The construction *loose-ac-cx* belongs to a subtype of the construction *apposition-cx*.

- (16) a. *Who, the direct of our art department __, has been with the company for ten years?
 b. *Who is the new school superintendent __, a veteran agriculture teacher?

In these examples, the *wh*-movement operation is applied only to the anchor in (16a), rendering them ungrammatical.

In the structure, the anchor NP serves as the head, the appositive serving as the modifier. This will also reflect the optional properties of the appositive, not the anchor:

- (17) a. Mary, back then a little girl, impressed her audience.
 b. Mary impressed her audience.
 c. *Back then a little girl, impressed the audience.

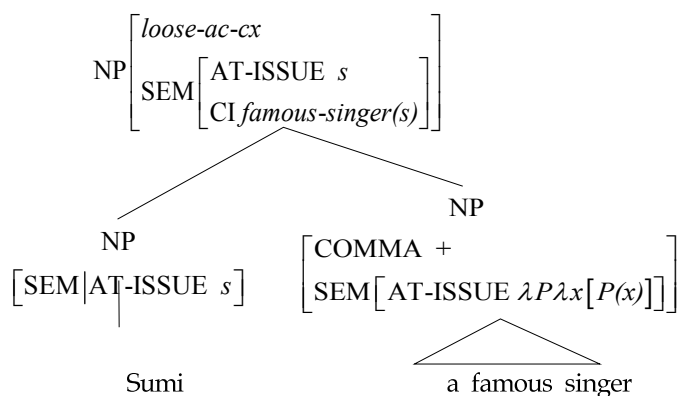
The constructional constraint also composes the semantics and pragmatics in a proper way. Consider the following:

- (18) a. It is not the case that Sumi, a famous singer, lives at Seoul.
 b. It is not the case that Sumi lives at Seoul.
 c. Sumi is a famous singer.

The sentence (18a) induces two propositional meaning: the proposition (18b) is the at-issue content while (18c) has the status of a conventional implicature.⁴⁴ Note that the meaning (18c) evoked by the appositive is outside the scope of negation. As suggested earlier, we thus have two different dimensions of content: at-issue and CI content, whose compositional processes we can represent as following:

4 Potts (2005) distinguishes the two levels of content in the type-system, e.g., t^i for the former and t^c for the latter. This type system prevents the grammar from generating an AC like *every boxer*; a *famous one* the quantified anchor ($\langle e, t^i \rangle$, t^i) and the appositive ($\langle e, t^c \rangle$) has a type clash to undergo a functional application.

(19)



As illustrated by the structure, the anchor and the appositive have their own at-issue contents, but when they participate in the apposition construction, the structure evokes a CI meaning. This process is in a sense triggered by the value of the feature *COMMA*. The process of turning the at-issue meaning into a CI message would not happen in the close AC, as seen from the following contrast:

- (20) a. My brother Peter is still at high school.
 b. My brother, Peter, is still at high school.

Unlike the loose AC, the appositive of the close AC just gives us a unique description of the extralinguistic reference. The close AC has an identifying function, different from a copular-relation in the loose AC. This way of dealing with the close and loose AC may provide a way of describing the similarities between the loose and close ACs while teasing apart their differences. In what follows, we will discuss the properties of the close AC in more detail.

3. On the Structure of the Close Apposition

There are at least five different subtypes of close AC in English, as exemplified from the following corpus data (see Keizer 2005, Lee 2014):

- (21) a. [The actor John Austin] plays Poe in the one-man show.
 b. [The word love] is so abused.
 c. [My friend the president] was a good man that did a bad thing.
 d. [Chuck Norris the actor] came out here.
 e. [Actor James Franco] is now in rare company.

The classifications here are based on the distribution of definite article, proper noun, common noun on the anchor as well as on the appositive.⁵⁵

Of these five types, the focus in the present paper is the one illustrated in (21a), a prototypical type of the close-AC. This type introduces something or someone relatively noteworthy that may be unfamiliar to the hearer (Jackendoff 1984), as illustrated in the following.

- (22) [The conservative writer [Michael Gerson]] took a tour of small-town Indiana.

The condition on the familiarity and noteworthy renders the first pair of the following examples ungrammatical.

- (23) a. ?*the doctor Ben Spock vs. the famous doctor Ben Spock
 b. ?*the friend Harry vs. the good friend Harry

In addition, only the definite article can occur in the anchor NP1 (see Acuña-Farifña 1999 among others).

- (24) a. *poet(s) James
 b. the poet James
 c. the excellent James

5 These five different types can be schematized as following:

- (i) a. Type 1: Det + N + Prop-N (e.g., the actor John Austin)
 b. Type 2: Det + N + CN (e.g., the word *love*)
 c. Type 3: PosDet + N + Det + CN (e.g., my friend the president)
 d. Type 4: Prop-N + Det + CN (e.g., Chuck Norris the actor)
 e. Type 5: Title-N + Prop-N (e.g., actor James Franco)

For the detailed discussion of these five types, see Keizer (2005).

d. the James who came here yesterday

- (25) a. *a poet James
b. *an excellent James
c. *a James who came here yesterday

Such grammatical constraints then question the headedness of the close AC. Is it NP1 anchor or NP2 appositive that functions as the head of the construction. It is tempting to take NP2 appositive to be a modifier. However, assuming NP2 as a modifier raises several issues. For example, NP2 in the appositive position has significant information that affects the meaning of a whole sentence: the meaning of *James Dean* in (26) is a key to the sentential meaning.

- (26) There was a lottery company that tried to sell socks bearing the likeness of [the actor James Dean].

In addition, the appositive NP2 cannot be elided in spite of its modifying function:

- (27) a. His big Irish face is, for a moment, indistinguishable from [the actor John Goodman's].
b. *His big Irish face is, for a moment, indistinguishable from the actor.
c. His big Irish face is, for a moment, indistinguishable from the actor's.

In fact, the anchor and appositive NPs in question do not always function equally. The anchor NP1 can be a complex noun with a modifier, but the appositive NP2 is limited to a proper noun only:

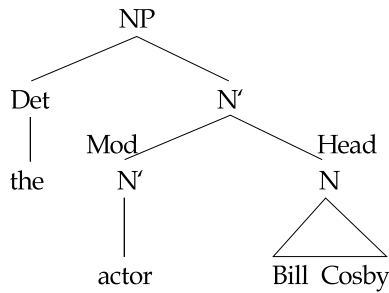
- (28) a. [The conservative writer [Michael Gerson]] took a tour of small-town Indiana.
b. [[The struggling actor] [Matt Hobbs]] becomes a driver for an obnoxious studio executives.

NP1 cannot be interchangeable with NP2, or vice versa: the interchangeability depends on context:

- (29) a. the actor Bill Cosby/*Bill Cosby the actor
 b. the writer Michael Gerson/*Michael Gerson the writer

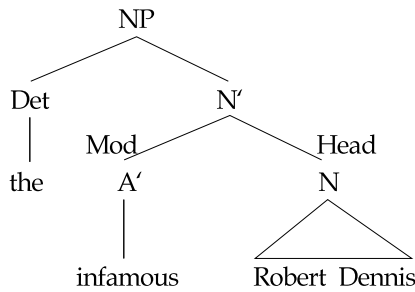
Considering all these, the structure of the close AC we consider here is a modifier-head structure, as represented in (30).

(30)



This structure is reminiscent of the typical NP structure illustrated in the following:

(31)



The structure of the close AC, following the typical NP structure in (31), allows the appositive to function as the head while the anchor to be its modifier.

The typical modifier-head structure can tell us why Det1 needs to be definite:

- (32) a. the/*a famous writer John
 b. the/*an infamous Rother Dennis

This modifier-head structure also accounts for the fact that the definite Det1 takes scope over the whole construction.

(33) ... including [the [poet Carl Sandburg] and [musicians Pete Seeger and Buri Ives]],...

The definite article scopes over these proper nouns including Pete Seeger and Buri Ives. The headedness of N2 can also account for the 'kind-of' property: There are several 'John's' in the given set and the close-AC describes a kind of 'John':

(34) the actor John, the student John, the writer John, the poet John,...

With these properties taken into account, we assume the close AC has the following constructional properties:

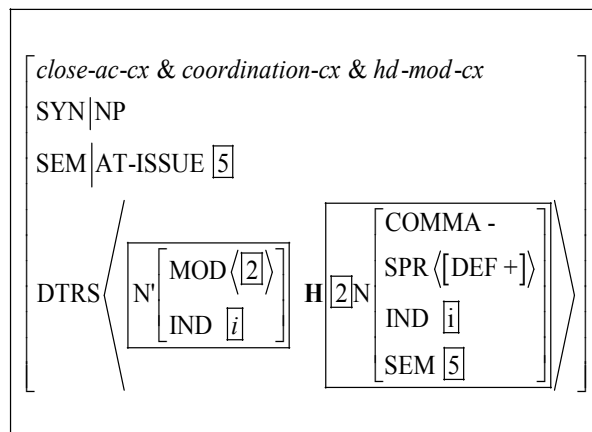
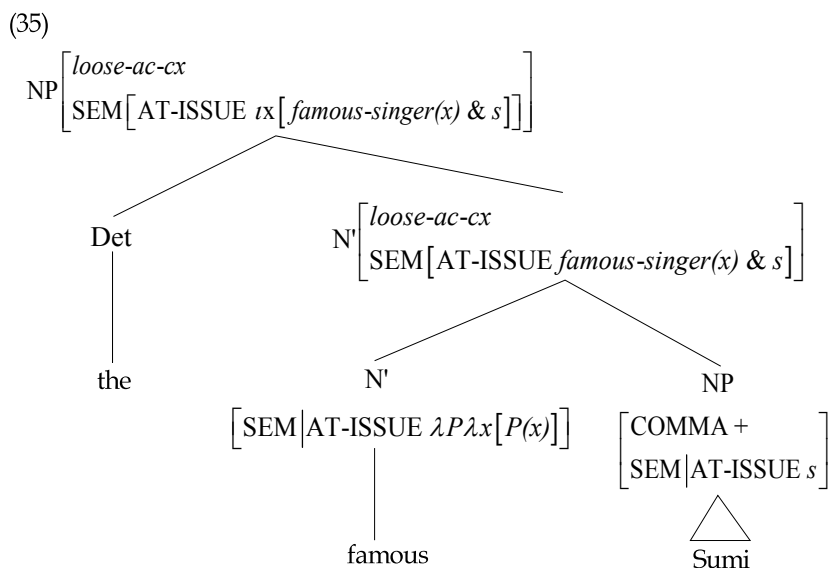


Figure 2: English Close Apposition Construction

As specified in this constructional constraint, the close AC also has two nominals as its daughters, forming a modifier-head structure. The head NP2 carries no phonological pause, differing from the loose AC. Note that the anchor nominal expression still requires a definite article, excluding examples like *a good teacher Johnson*. The two nominals carry identical index values, a typical property of a

modifier-head structure. The second nominal expression, the appositive, thus does not introduce any independent proposition. The semantic composition of the close AC is illustrated by the following:



The semantic composition of the expression *the famous singer Sumi* is thus equivalent to an expression like *the infamous Robert Dennis* in which the proper noun *Robert Dennis* functioning as the head is modified by *infamous*. There is no conventional implicature evoked by the construction.

4. Grammatical Differences between Close and Loose Apposition

As noted in the previous section, the close AC restricts the denotation of the anchor, typically providing identifying information, so that its anchor is definite. The close AC's appositive expression is typically a proper name while the anchor is a common NP as illustrated from examples in (36a). Note that the reverse ordering is also possible as shown in (36b):

- (36) a. the singer Robinson, the novel *Great Expectations*, the number 1970,...
b. Robinson the singer, Thomas the plumber, Wright the lawyer,...

In (36a), all the anchor expressions here are preceded by a definite determiner and denote more general properties than the appositive. Meanwhile in (36b), the appositive expression is a definite NP while the anchor is a proper name.

The loose AC behaves slightly in a different way. As seen from the examples in (37), the anchor can be an indefinite NP with a proper noun appositive:

- (37) a. The university lecturer, Dr. Brown, will be arrested soon.
b. A university lecturer, Dr. Brown, was arrested for the crime.

What this implies is that as for the close AC, the anchor is restricted to be a definite NP. This differentiates between the two, as seen from the following contrast (Delorme and Dougherty 1972, Burton-Roberts 1975):

- (38) a. *Mary invited a linguist Johnson to her party.
b. Mary invited a linguist, Johnson, to her party.

- (39) a. Mary invited the great linguist Johnson to her party.
b. Mary invited the great linguist, Johnson, to her party.

We can observe further morpho-syntactic differences between the two. Observe the different positional possibility (Burton-Roberts 1975, Acuña-Farifña 1999, 2009):

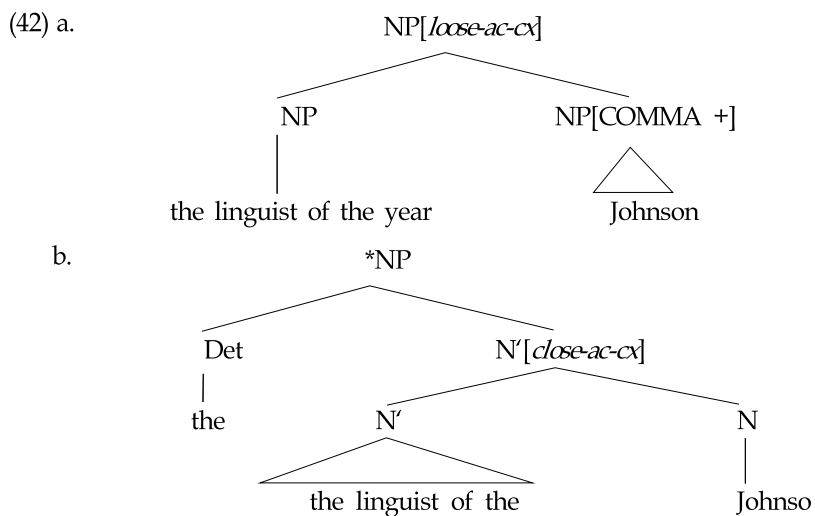
- (40) a. The linguist of the year, Johnson, is a brilliant man.
b. *The linguist of the year Johnson is a brilliant man.

As seen here in (40a), the anchor of a loose AC can be modified or intervened by a complement, but this is not possible with that of a close AC as in (40b).

Note that our distinction between the loose and close AC captures these differences. The close AC requires its Det1 to be definite. This rules out examples like *a linguist John*. This is predicted from an independent constraint for the prenominal modifier in English:

- (41) a. the man proud of his son
 b. *the proud of his son man

The contrast implies that the prenominal modifier cannot be a heavy or complex phrase. The structures that the present analysis generates can tell us this difference in a precise way:



The two structures tell us that the loose AC is a head-modifier construction, and there is nothing wrong for the expression *Johnson* to modify the complex NP *the linguist of the year*. However, in the close AC, the head *Johnson* is illegitimately modified by the nominal expression *linguist of the year* in the prenominal position.

The two types of AC behave differently with respect to rightward movement:

- (43) a. Mary, our daughter, will attend college this year.
 b. Mary will attend college this year, our daughter.

- (44) a. Our daughter Mary will attend college this year.
 b. *Our daughter will attend college this year, Mary.

The contrast here implies that the loose AC allows its appositive to undergo

rightward movement to the sentence final position. However, this is not allowed in the close AC, as seen from (44b). The flexible ordering of the loose AC, different from the close AC, can be also found in the possibility of reversing the anchor and appositive:

- (45) a. My friend, John, is a great tennis player.
b. John, my friend, is a great tennis player.

- (46) a. My friend John is a great tennis player.
b. *John my friend is a great tennis player.

This difference is also expected from our analysis. In the present analysis, the close AC is a modifier-head structure in which the modifier is in the prenominal position. Meanwhile, the loose AC is a head-modifier structure. In English, it is rather free to dislocate a postnominal modifier:

- (47) a. The teacher, coming from Seoul, teaches linguistics.
b. The teacher teaches linguistics, coming from Seoul.

The prenominal expression is rather strict in its distributional possibilities. VP ellipsis brings about another difference between the loose and close AC (see Lasersohn 1986):

- (48) a. *My friend, Fred, lives in Seoul, and so does my friend, Dave.
b. My friend Fred lives in Seoul, and so does my friend Dave.

The loose AC in (48a) cannot be the subject of the elided VP while this is possible in the close AC (48b). A similar contrast is observed in the following:

- (49) a. John sold Mary, his best friend, a lemon, and Max did too.
b. Tom owns an expensive violin, once the property of Heifetz, and Jane has one too.

(49a) implies that Max sold a lemon to Mary, but this does not mean that Mary is Max's best friend. The interpretation of the elided VP does not include the

appositive *his best friend* The same goes for (49b): Jane has an expensive violin, but this does not mean that Jane's violin used to be Heifetz's.

Such a difference between the two types of apposition has to do with the independent message and conventional implicature induced by the appositive of the loose AC. In terms of syntactic structures, both the loose AC and the close AC form an NP structure, even though the internal structure is different. The introduction of the CI hinges on the surface strings. When there is no surface string of the appositive in the loose AC, no CI is evoked. This explains the meaning difference in (48).

5. Conclusion

Both the loose AC and close AC juxtapose two seemingly equivalent expressions, but behave quite differently in many grammatical respects. In this paper I suggest that they share coordination and subordination properties, but each has its own constructional properties. The loose AC is a head-modifier structure in which the appositive, functioning as a modifier, also evokes an independent message linked to the conversational implicature. Meanwhile the close AC is a modifier-head structure in which the head is a proper noun requiring a definite specifier. We have seen that the different behavior of the two appositive constructions follows from these constructional constraints.

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