

Apposition from the Perspective of Construction Grammar

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Overview

- The problematic nature of apposition
- Apposition in Meyer (1992)
- Apposition in construction grammar
 - Appositions with Proper NPs as schematic idioms



The problematic nature of apposition

- Boundary issues
 - Which constructions should be considered appositions?
 - Where does one draw the line between apposition and other relations, such as modification or complementation?
 - Some examples of the problem (handout 1 and 2)



Possible choices for dealing with the heterogenous nature of apposition

- Limit apposition to two juxtaposed co-referential NPs separated by an intonation boundary (Acuña 1996)
- Expand the number of constructions admitted into the category of apposition by increasing the linguistic relationships existing between the units in apposition (Meyer 1992)

Apposition in Meyer (1992)

- Apposition is a grammatical relation (in opposition to other grammatical relations such as complementation or modification)
- Constructions realizing the relation of apposition have specific syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic characteristics
- Some appositions are more appositional than others
 - 1a-e represent a gradient from most (1a) to least (1e) appositional



An alternative but complementary approach

Describing apposition from the perspective of
construction grammar



Constructions

‘conventionalized pairings of form and function’
(Goldberg 2006: 3)

Appositions as constructions

- Appositions have various forms
- One of the more frequently occurring forms contains a proper NP in one of the units
- This apposition has resemblances to formal [‘schematic’] idioms: ‘...syntactic patterns dedicated to semantic and pragmatic purposes not knowable from their form alone’ (Fillmore, Kay, and O’Connor 1988: 505)
- This contradicts Acuña’s (2006: 2) claim that appositions have no easily identifiable structure, and that they ‘thrive on little else than mere iconic proximity’.

Some examples of schematic idioms

- *the x-er, the y-er*
 - The longer you practice, the better you will become (Croft 2001: 16)
- *let alone*
 - I barely got up in time to EAT LUNCH, let alone COOK BREAKFAST
 - I doubt you could get FRED to eat SHRIMP, let alone LOUISE SQUID (Fillmore et al. 512)
- Lakoff's (1987) discussion of existential/deictic *there*



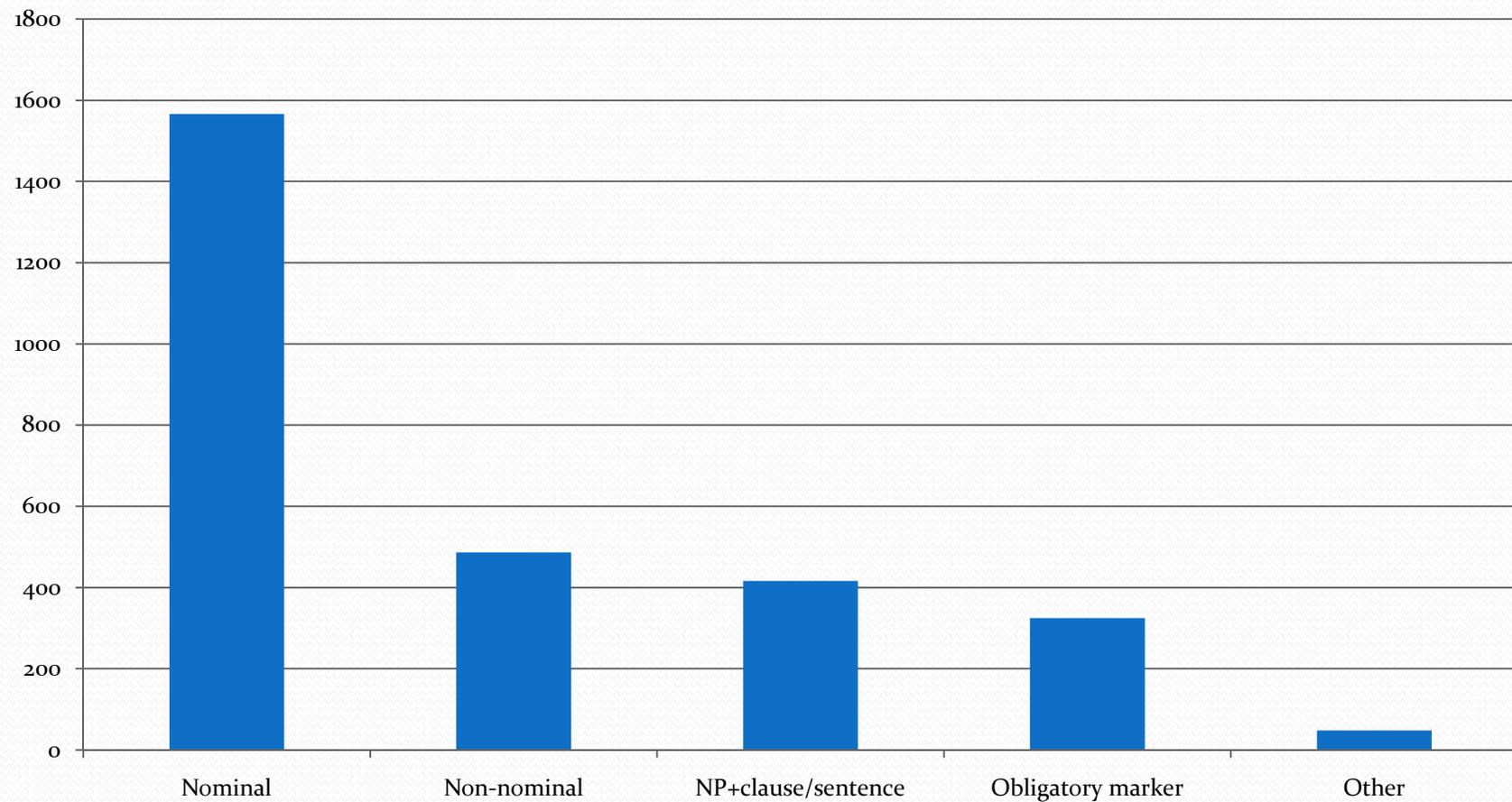
Some initial observations

- See handout #3

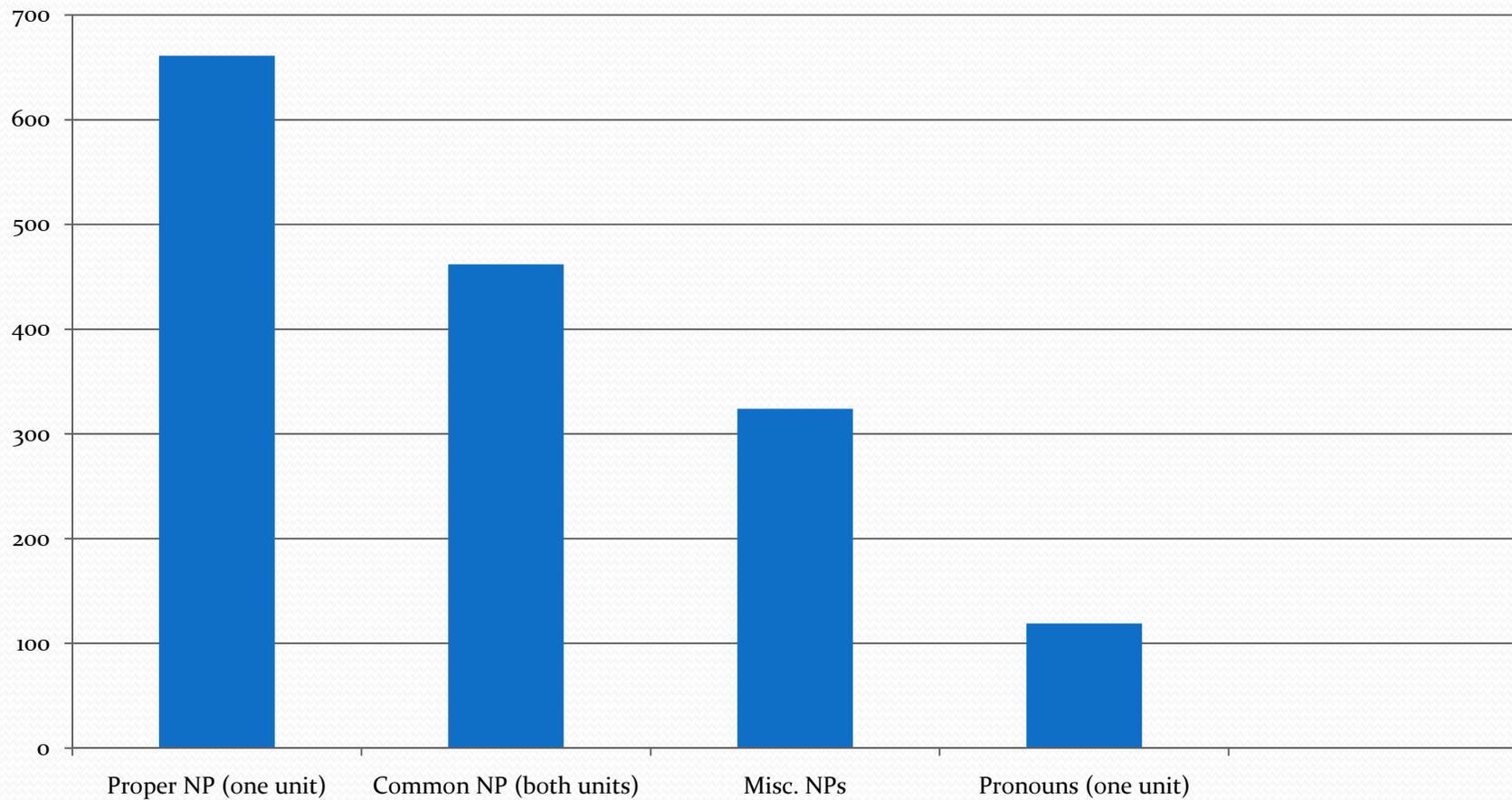
Corpora consulted in Meyer (1992)

- London-Lund Corpus (1960-1980)
- Brown Corpus (1961)
- Survey of English Usage Corpus ('Quirk Corpus')(1955-1985)
- Genres: press, learned (humanistic/scientific), fiction (Brown and SEU); spontaneous conversations (LLC)
- 120,000 words (evenly divided among genres) from each corpus

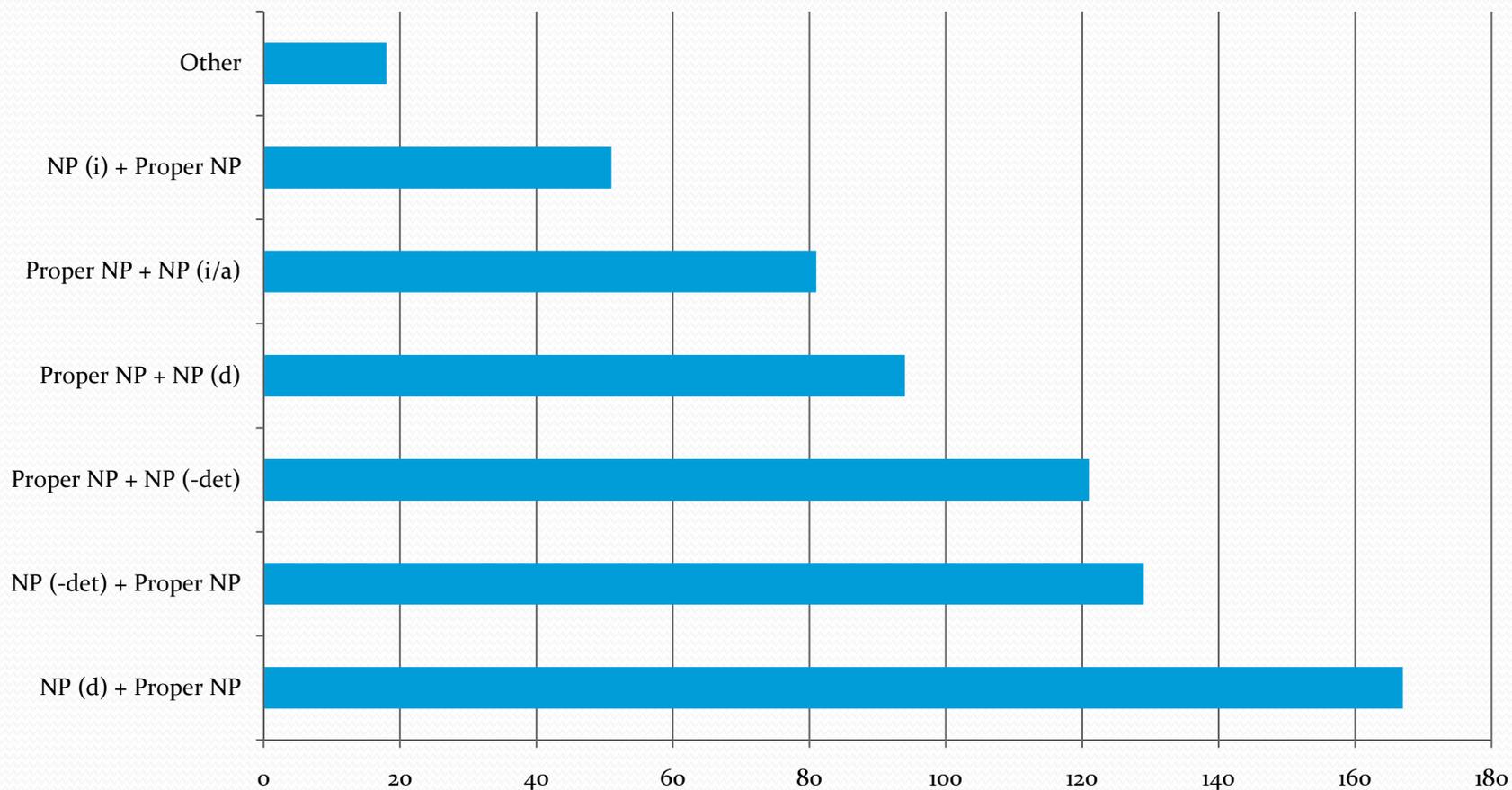
Forms of appositions (raw frequencies)



Forms of nominal appositions (raw frequencies)



Forms of Appositions with Proper Nouns (raw frequencies)



The Pattern

NP	comma pause	[det] NP
proper noun		common noun
<i>personal name</i>		<i>occupation/ position/status</i>



order is reversible

Example: *Barack Obama, the current president of the United States*



Potential problem: pseudo-titles(Bell 1988), one type of apposition

Technology editor Kenneth James (ICE Singapore)

lawyer Gitobu Imanyara (ICE-East Africa)

player Zandro "Jun" Limpot (ICE-Philippines)

Opposition member Bruce Golding (ICE Jamaica)

Policy committee chairman Lynn Bublitz (ICE-NZ)

fellow Brandeis student Susan E. Saxe (ICE-USA)

Financial adviser David Innes (ICE-GB:W2C-009 #41:2)

Examples from Meyer (2004)



Distinctive nature of pseudo-titles

- Lack a comma pause between the two units
- Require a full name

A separate (but related) pattern?

NP

[modifier] common noun

*occupation/
status/position*

NP

proper noun

full personal name

Examples: *newspaper reporter Hall Irwin*

librarian Harriet Smith

Variation among national varieties

- Some national varieties (e.g. New Zealand, Philippines) allow greater length of first unit than others (e.g. US, Great Britain)
 - **Conservative housing spokesman** Cllr Irwin Van Colle (ICE-GB:W2C-009 #13:1)
 - **Autonomous Region of Muslime Mindanao police chief** Damming Unga (ICE-Philippines)



The function of appositions with Proper NPs



The oddity of this type of apposition

You might say to someone:

Jack Smith is a distinguished linguist

You probably wouldn't say:

A distinguished linguist, Jack Smith, is having a drink with me later

But you definitely wouldn't say:

Distinguished linguist Jack Smith is having a drink with me later

Why?

These constructions occur in very restricted registers (frequencies per 1000 words)

Genre	A	C
Fiction		
SEU	24 (0.6)	35 (0.9)
Brown	19 (0.4)	40 (1.0)
Total	43 (0.5)	75 (0.9)
Conversation		
Intimates	1 (0.03)	11 (0.4)
Equals	7 (0.2)	9 (0.3)
Disparates	8 (0.3)	4 (0.1)
Intimates/equals	5 (0.2)	13 (0.4)
Total	21 (0.2)	37 (0.3)
Learned		
Scientific (Brown)	2 (0.1)	6 (0.3)
Scientific (SEU)	6 (0.3)	17 (0.9)
Humanistic (Brown)	12 (0.6)	15 (0.8)
Humanistic (SEU)	5 (0.3)	6 (0.3)
Total	25 (0.3)	44 (0.6)
Press		
SEU	89 (2.2)	147 (3.7)
Brown	179 (4.4)	147 (3.7)
Total	268 (3.4)	294 (3.7)
Total	357 (1.0)	450 (1.25)

A = Appellation
C = Characterization

(Meyer 1992: 116)

Why appositions with Proper Nouns occur in press reportage: an example

Jessica Seinfeld's broccoli-spiked chicken nuggets recipes are all hers, a federal judge ruled Thursday.

Ms. Seinfeld...did not copy from another author in her cookbook about sneaking vegetables into children's food, the judge said when she threw out a copyright infringement case brought by a competing author, Missy Chase Lapine.

NY Times, Sept. 11, 2009



They provide necessary information

Ms. Seinfeld, the wife of the comedian Jerry Seinfeld, did not copy from another author in her cookbook about sneaking vegetables into children's food....



Explanation for genre distributions: grounding

- the ability of nominals and finite clauses to create ‘a basic connection between the interlocutors and the content evoked’ (Langacker 2008: 259)



Proper Names

- Do not simply refer to individuals but ‘evoke substantial bodies of information...widely shared within a speech community’ (Langacker 2008: 316)
 - E.g. George Washington: general, president, honest, etc



Proper names in press reportage

- In newspapers, the units in apposition supply information about people *not* shared within the community of readers
 - We should want to read about Jessica Seinfeld not just because she won a lawsuit but because she's Jerry Seinfeld's wife



Why schematic idioms to do this?

- Because over time, newspapers have developed conventionalized, formulaic linguistic constructions for providing the necessary information about people mentioned in news stories
- The next step in my research: to see whether the patterns I have uncovered in older corpora can be found in more recent corpora
 - I suspect they can