

Endocentric/exocentric constructions, syntactic relations and apposition

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José Ramón Varela Pérez

1 ► Introduction

This is a paper about syntactic constructions and relations, and more specifically about a particular type of relation (not always recognized as such) known as apposition, and how it has not been properly understood yet.

General syntactic relations such as coordination, subordination or complementation have been widely described by most linguists. Apposition, however, has not yet gained this traditional status among the other syntactic relations. So first of all, I shall explain what apposition proper (also called canonical apposition) is, and later I shall explain in which ways apposition must be differentiated from the rest of syntactic relations.

“To appose” or “to stand in apposition” means “to put alongside of”. It is a loose term applied to any juxtaposition of two or more expressions. Typically these expressions or units have the same syntactic function and so they usually belong to the same syntactic class, as for instance two NPs in apposition.

By using this type of construction between two elements separated by commas in the written language or by a pause in the spoken language, we want the two units to be made equivalent, to have the

same meaning. In this way, the term “apposition” is mostly applied to nouns or noun phrases as can be seen in (1): 161

(1) Anna, my best friend, was here last night.

Here the two NPs in apposition -*Anna* and *my best friend*- converge in the same extralinguistic reference, that is, they refer to the same person.

However, apart from NPs, apposition is a relation that can be maintained by other syntactic units: by verb phrases (2), verbs (3), prepositional phrases (4) or even entire clauses (5).

(2) He broke the window into pieces, smashed it.

(3) He ran -sprinted- up the hill.

(4) It was at six o'clock that she left, just before sunset.

(5) That clock doesn't go -it's not working at all.

It must also be taken into account that elements in apposition can belong to two different syntactic classes, as is the case in (6), where we have an adverbial phrase standing alongside a prepositional phrase:

(6) Peter is over there, in his room.

Another characteristic of apposition is that very often, between the two elements, we can introduce what is called a marker of apposition. They are expressions such as *that is, in other words, in short, namely, or, or rather, such as*, etc. Sometimes these markers are strongly obligatory as is the case in (7), but most typically they are not as in (8):

(7) Northern journalists heaped accusations of murder on the Southern states, particularly Alabama.

(8) *Dickens's most productive period, (that is) the 1840s*, was a time when public demand for fiction was growing.

What counts as apposition depends on what syntactic, semantic and even pragmatic criteria we hold for apposition to exist¹. The three most commonly alluded criteria are the following:

a) Two units in apposition have the same function with respect to the rest of the sentence. This usually implies two things; first of all, one or the other element in apposition can be omitted without producing a change in the meaning of the whole sentence. So for (1) we may say: Anna was here last night or My best friend was here last night. The second implication is that the order of the two units can be reversed, again with no alteration in the meaning. So again for (1): My best friend, Anna, was here last night.

b) Semantically, units in apposition are coreferential, that is, they refer to the same person or thing; thus for (1) we could say that Anna and my best friend are the same person.

As can be seen, this second criterion focuses on the apposition of noun phrases. A rather complex matter is to consider as apposition proper those cases of units which are not clearly coreferential, as in (9):

(9) It's too expensive, much bigger than I thought

Some authors would prefer to consider the relation between *too expensive* and *much bigger than I thought* as a case of juxtaposition.

Another important point to notice is that coreferential units in apposition do not have to be juxtaposed. According to this, then, the first criterion would not work in these cases. See, for instance, (10):

(10) *A present* was given to Mary, *a new book*

c) Pragmatically, the second unit in apposition must supply new information about the first element.

2 ► The role of apposition among syntactic constructions and relations

So far I have presented a short account of what canonical apposition is. A second question to be answered would be: what kind of construction do elements in apposition form? What kind of syntactic relation is there between *Anna* and its coreferent *my best friend* in (1)? Following Bloomfield (1931) and Allerton (1979:126-28), and according to distributional criteria we have endocentric and exocentric constructions. Endocentric constructions can be either subordinative or coordinative:

Construction types	Omissibility	Relation between constituents
EXOCENTRIC	AB	Interdependence
SUBORDINATIVE	(A)B	Dependence
COORDINATIVE	(A)(B)	Independence

(Allerton, *Essentials of Grammatical Theory*, 1979:126)

A construction is exocentric if both its constituents are obligatory. Nothing of this happens in apposition as I have shown. Endocentric constructions can be coordinative -and we are talking of the joining of two heads -or subordinative- and then we are referring to an obligatory head followed or preceded by modifiers. Apposition would not fit in this classification.

¹ Notes

For these syntactic, semantic and pragmatic criteria see Burton-Roberts (1975:450-51) (1994: 184-87), Quirk et al. (1985:1302), Meyer (1992:41) and Lago (1993:421-32).

A solution proposed by Hockett (1958) was that appositives are a subtype of endocentric coordinate constructions in which each of its units is the attribute of the other. Apposition would be endocentric with respect to both its immediate constituents.

However, according to his criteria, structures such as *the poet Burns* are instances of apposition. As I shall explain later, these are cases of noun phrases composed of a head and a modifier.

On the other hand, other linguists say that both units in apposition, *Anna* and *my best friend* in (1), are heads and modifiers at the same time. If this is so, apposition is certainly different from everything else altogether.

Now let us see another such classification proposed by P.H. Matthews (1981: 220-39). On the one hand, he distinguishes the relationship of coordination. On the other, a very general relationship called dependence, which covers the relations of modification (such as an adjective modifying a noun) and complementation (as for instance a transitive verb requiring a direct object as its complement. Thirdly, he proposes a relation called juxtaposition, which can be appositive (notice that for this author apposition only exists between juxtaposed units) or correlative (as in comparatives such as *The sooner, the better*). It is here, in this ad hoc relation that Matthews includes apposition, to which he refers as an “undifferentiated relationship”. The term apposition would be used to characterise a group of constructions which cannot be grouped by a single criterion. For him some cases of apposition tend to be cases of dependency, while others belong more to coordination:

1. Coordination
2. Dependence (Subordination)
- 2.1 Modification/Determination
- 2.2 Complementation
3. Juxtaposition
- 3.1 Apposition (“undifferentiated relationship”)
- 3.2 Correlation

Other authors such as Quirk et al. (1985:1302) and Meyer (1992:130-33) also accept the existence of borderline cases. Thus, they speak of a gradation between cases of full or central apposition versus partial or peripheral apposition. The latter would not fulfill all of the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic criteria that were proposed above.

For Meyer (1992:41) apposition can be either coordinative or subordinative. Those structures that are coordinative will be considered cases of central apposition; those that are subordinative will be examples of peripheral apposition. Notice, then, that although for this author apposition is an independent kind of relation, he still defines it with respect to the other syntactic relations.

If we accept the existence of less codified cases of apposition along with more paradigmatic cases, there is the problem that we should also accept partial vs. full coordination, or partial vs. full complementation. And, traditionally at least, most syntacticians have not agreed with this view, though for others, syntactic relations are not so easily cut out.

But there are definite ways of distinguishing apposition proper from both coordination and dependency. In order to do this I shall look more closely into boundary cases between these relations.

2.1 Apposition vs. Coordination

First of all we find apposition vs. coordination. In a way, we could say that apposition resembles coordination in that both units -for example two noun phrases- are usually of the same level. Moreover, both units are usually taken to be heads: neither of them is subordinated to the other. 163

The differences, however, are both syntactic and semantic. Coordination is additive; it creates pluralities, as can be seen in (11) where we have a plural verb “were” in agreement with the subject:

(11) *Anna and my best friend* were here last night

Moreover, apposition is reduplicative. Both its two units refer to the same entity, whereas in coordination the units refer to two different things or people.

However, disjunctive coordination -with the conjunction “or”- is sometimes difficult to distinguish from some cases of apposition with the marker “or”. Thus, while (12) is a clear case of apposition, (13) has two interpretations:

(12) They have a thing called First University Exam or FUE

(13) Either *his wife* or *his mistress* visited Jane

In the first interpretation of (13), the two units would be joined by a relation of coordination: we are

talking of two different people: that person has both a wife and a mistress and it was one or the other who visited Jane. In the appositional interpretation, the speaker does not know if the person alluded to is married or not; both units -wife and mistress- would refer to one person only. The units would then have the same extralinguistic reference.

2.2 Apposition vs. Modification

Now let us see apposition vs. subordination. It must be clear by now that, by the first criterion established above, subordination is completely different from canonical apposition. But there are certain similarities. Hierarchically, apposition is a linear relation. We can say that the second unit in (1) is apposed to the first one that precedes it. The order of the units is, to a certain extent, pertinent, as in subordination. We choose the second unit to reinforce, comment or correct the first unit; so, in a way, in (1) the speaker wants to stress the fact that the Anna who was here last night is, besides, my best friend. It seems then that the first unit is a type of head and that the second one sort of modifies it as in dependency.

164 For Sopher (1972:401) apposition differs from both subordination and coordination. However, there is a contradiction in his definition of apposition when he speaks of a head group and appositional group, which, in a way, implies modification.

Traditionally, modification can be restrictive or non-restrictive, as in restrictive vs. non-restrictive relative clauses. In the same fashion, some authors have spoken of non-restrictive apposition (which would correspond to my earlier definition of what apposition proper is) opposed to restrictive (or *close*) apposition. Now it must be clear that this restrictive or close apposition is an instance of modification. In this respect we can see (14)-(18):

- (14) The poet Burns/Burns the poet
- (15) The city of Naples
- (16) We doctors
- (17) Mr President
- (18) My sister Anna came to my place last night

These are all instances of one noun functioning as an adjective which modifies another noun. They are all, then, instances of traditional endocentric subordinative noun phrases. In some cases, these structures pass one or the other of the syntactic and

semantic criteria established above. In other cases the order of the elements can be reversed or one of them can stand alone without the other. But in fact, as Burton-Roberts (1975:397) shows, the constituents of noun phrases like (14)-(19) cannot be coreferential. So let us see each of the cases individually.

In (14) we can distinguish the poet Burns from the novelist Burns: "poet" is then a premodifier of the head "Burns", and not a coreferential unit. In (15) we could equal "city" and "Naples"; but "Naples" as an entity cannot be equated solely with the city: we have the kingdom of Naples, the music of Naples, the literature of Naples, etc.

Cases (16), (17) and (18) are more or less the same. In (16) we have the specifier "we" modifying the head "doctors"; the expression is equivalent to "the doctors" or "some doctors". In (17 "Mr" is considered to be a title like "president" or "Lord", a special kind of specifier. Finally (18) does pose a problem for this analysis; we have two nouns which are coreferential and can pass the syntactic criteria established earlier. The only difference with (1) can be seen in the fact that the two units are not separated by a pause. So is this a case of apposition proper or just a special case of restrictive modification? (19) below is an example of a reduced non-restrictive relative clause. Some authors, in fact, reduce prototypical cases of apposition such as (1) to such an analysis:

- (19) Mr Smith, an upholsterer, has big feet

However, there is a difference as (19) shows: we cannot substitute *an upholsterer* for the whole *Mr Smith, an upholsterer*. It does not make sense to say **An upholsterer has big feet*. So *an upholsterer* is just a postmodifier, a reduced non-restrictive relative clause.

2.3 Apposition vs. Complementation

(20) represents for some authors a case of partial apposition. However, it must be considered a case of complementation:

- (20) The fact that he did it is important

The noun *fact*, like a transitive verb, seems to require a complement in the sense that not all nouns

could be placed instead of *fact*; we cannot say **the matter that he did it* for instance. The head *fact* functions as a deverbal noun, as for example “announcement” in *the announcement that he did it*, which is equivalent to *He announced that he did it*

2.4 Apposition vs. Peripheral elements

Finally, (21) shows an example of a peripheral element -*a shy man*- functioning as a reduction of an adverb clause:

(21) A shy man, Peter seldom speaks

It would be equivalent to the sentence *Because he is a shy man, Peter seldom speaks*.

So to conclude, we must say that apposition proper, as exemplified by sentences (1) to (8) and (10), represents a distinct, differentiated type of syntactic relation between two elements which are coreferential and have the same syntactic function with respect to the whole of the sentence. Apposition is then opposed to both coordination and dependency (modification and complementation)

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