Workshop *Modification and (Non-)Existence-Entailing Predicates*

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# Special Quantifiers and Nonexistents

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## 1. Overview

1. Special quantifiers in contexts of (apparent) reference to nonexistents
2. Semantic and syntactic characteristics of special quantifiers
3. Substitutional and higher-order approaches and their problems
4. The Nominalization Theory of special quantifiers
5. The Nominalization Theory and the ‘reification status’ of nonexistents

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### **2. The syntactic and semantic characteristics of special quantifiers**

**2.1. The range of special quantifiers**

In English

*Something, everything, nothing, much, a lot, several things, one thing, two things*

Special pronouns

*That, what*

Non-special quantifiers

*Some thing, every thing, some object, some entity*

Non-special pronouns

*It, them, which*

### Special quantifiers in German

*Alles* ‘everything’*, nichts* ‘nothing’*, viel* ‘much’*, wenig* ‘little’*, etwas ‘something’, eines* ‘one thing’, *mehrere Dinge* ‘several things’*, das* ‘that’*, was* ‘what’

Special quantifiers in French

*Tout, rien, beaucoup, peu, quelque chose, une chose, plusieurs choses, le, ça, (ce) que*

#### 2.2. Special quantifiers in place of non-referential complements

Special quantifiers (and pronouns) can replace various sorts of nonreferential complements without giving rise to the *Substitution Problem* or the *Objectivization Effect* (‘Prior’s Problem’) (Moltmann 2003a, b, 2013).

### Clausal complements

1. a. John thought that he won the race.

b. ??? John thought a thing / a proposition.

c. John thought something.

1. a. John said that he won the race.

b. ??? John said a thing / an utterance / a proposition.

c. John said something / only one thing.

### Predicative complements (of copula verbs)

(3) a. Mary is / remained / became happy.

b. ??? Mary is / remained / became a property.

c. Mary is / remained / became something enviable.

### DP complements of intensional transitive verbs

(4) a. John needs at least two assistants.

b. ??? John needs a quantifier / a property / an entity.

#### c. John needs something.

#### Direct quotes as complements

(5) a. John said ‘great’.

1. ??? John said the adjective ‘great’ / some expression.
2. John said something.
3. John said the word ‘help’ / just a single word.

**2.3. Special quantifiers in contexts of apparent reference to nonexistents**

Intensional verbs

(6) a. What did John thought about? – the woman described in the novel

b. John thought about something / ?? someone, the woman described in the novel.

Existence predicates

(7) a. There are things that do not exist.

b. The ideal student does not exist.

There is something that does not exist.

c. ??? There is someone that does not exist.

d. ??? There are strange things that do not exist.

#### 2.4. Special quantifiers replacing plural and mass DPs in referential position

##### 1. Definite plural and mass DPs

1. a. John counted the peas / ??? the sum / collection / set of the peas.

b. John counted something, the peas.

1. a. John cannot distinguish the kittens / ??? the group / sum of the kittens.

b. What John cannot distinguish are the kittens.

1. a. John collected something, the wood.

b. ??? John collected the sum / collection / amount of wood.

2. Bare plurals and mass nouns as kind terms

(11) a. John ate various things today, beans, peas, apples, and carrots.

b. ??? John ate various kinds today, beans, peas, apples, and carrots.

##### 3. Simple number words (Moltmann 2013)

1. a. Two and two is four.

b. What is two and two?

c. ??? Which number is two and two.

1. a. John added two to ten.

b. John added something to ten.

c. ??? John added the number four to tent.

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#### 3. On the syntax of special quantifiers

##### 3.1. Special quantifiers with *-thing* vs. quantifiers with the ordinary noun *thing*

1. *–thing* as a bound morpheme:

(14) a. John is some thing. (false)

b. John is something. (true) 2. Position of adjectival modifiers

(15) a. John said something nice.

b. ??? John said some nice thing.

2. Absolutely unrestricted quantification

(16) Everything there is exists.

Meaning of the ordinary noun *thing*

Primary meaning: material objects and artifacts

*-thing* is a ‘light noun’

### Syntactic structure of special quantifiers (Kayne 2005, Moltmann 2022)

(17) *A lot*: a lot ~~thing~~ *what*: what- ~~thing~~ *whatever*: what-~~thing~~ – ever

### Other light quantifiers (Kayne 2005, 2010)

*Everybody, someplace, sometime.*

*-body, -place*, and *-time* as overt versions of the light nouns PERSON, PLACE, and TIME

*where*-PLACE, similary, *there*-PLACE, *what*-THING, *that*-THING, *when*-TIME

### Features of light nouns

* Can remain silent without there being an antecedent.
* Belong to the functional, rather than the lexical part of grammar
* Form a universal inventory
* Special movement properties (licences PP somewhere)
* Syntactic features strictly semantically determined (gender features, mass-count distinction)

Light nouns as part of compounds:

Moltmann (2022): Proper names are compounds of a name and a light noun

(18) *John-*PERSON, *Berlin*-PLACE, France-PLACE *Sanssouci*-HOUSE,

*Notre Dame*-HOUSE, *2022*-TIME, *two*-THING

(PERSON, HOUSE are count, TIME, PLACE, THING are mass. Therefore, *Berlin, France, 2022*, and *two* are treated as mass nouns in German. )

#### 3.2. Reifying uses of special quantifiers in referential position

Mass and neutral uses of *–thing* (19) (19) a. John ate something, an apple.

b. John ate something, brown rice.

1. Mary needs something nice, bath salts / chocolate / an art book.
2. a. John ate something, the cookies.

b. I brought you something, a cup, a plate, and a fork.

1. What did John evaluate? The paintings / the art / the proposal.
2. There is something John is unable to count, namely the grains of sand.

### Count uses of *–thing* (Moltmann 2016, 2022, Sainsbury 2018)

(24) a. There are two things John does not like, the beans and the bread.

b. John has evaluated several things: the paintings, the sculptures, and the drawings.

(distributive reading)

c. There are several things John cannot distinguish: the cups, the glasses, and the plates. (collective, ‘internal’ readings)

**3.3. Special quantification as non-nominal quantification?**

A common philosophers’ view

Special quantifiers are non-nominal quantifiers.

### Not to be understood syntactically

Special quantifiers *something, everthing* etc are nominal!

- require case (not assigned by adjectives or nouns):

1. a. John is happy that he won / \* something.

b. the proof that he won / \* something They - can appear after prepositions:

1. John is happy about something / \* that he won.

- cannot be extraposed:

1. It is true that John won / \* something.

The morpheme *thing (-things)* is nominal.

### Better candidates for syntactically non-nominal quantifiers

Philosophers’ favorite example: *somehow*

But adverbial quantifiers of this sort are highly restricted:

1. a. \* everyhow, \* nohow
   1. in every way, in no way (nominal!)

Other adverbial quantifiers:

1. a. sometime, \*everytime, \*notime,

b. always, never

c. somewhere, everywhere, nowhere

Difference in accepting restrictions (see below)

1. \*somehow unusual, ok somewhere nice, ok always when it rains

more likely nominal quantifiers with silent preposition (Kayne 2010).

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#### 4. Substitutional and higher-order approaches to special quantifiers

**4.1. The substitutional approach**

### The substitutional analysis (Sainsbury 2018)

(31) ‘X is V-ing something’ is true iff something of the form ‘X is Ving –‘ is a true vindicating instance.

### Dealing with standard problems for substitutional quantification

Instead of quantifying over expressions, quantification over concepts, in extended range, as well as over objects themselves.

### How the analysis applies

Quantification over

* predicates or predicative concepts
* sentences or their complex conceptual correlates
* quantifiers or their conceptual correlates

### Special quantifiers in the plural

Counting substitution instances

Application to pronouns? To wh-clauses? Direct quotes?

**4.2. The higher-order quantification approach**

### The higher-order view of special quantifiers

Prior, Wright, Williamson, Rosefeldt, d’Ambrosio, and others:

Special quantifiers are higher-order quantifiers, ranging over denotations that are not first-order entities and cannot be referred to as such *even in the metalanguage*.

(32) *John is something* is true iff for something F, F(John).

### How the analysis applies

Embedded clauses: quantification over sentential values (‘contents’)

Complements of intensional transitives: quantification over intensional quantifiers VP complements? Direct quotes?

### Special quantifiers replacing definite plural and mass DPs

Add genuine plural and mass quantification (also in the metalanguage)

Special quantifiers in the plural ?

Quantification over higher-order plurality, reification of pluralities and quantities

### Special pronouns

Reference to higher-order semantic values.

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#### 5. Problems for substitutional and higher-order approaches

##### 5.1. Quantifier restrictions1: adjectives

1. a. Mary is something admirable, courageous.
   1. Sue is something not uncommon, nervous.
2. a. John claimed something outrageous, that he is a genius.
   1. John said something strange, that he is an alien.
3. a. John said something true.
   1. Bill claimed something outrageous.
4. John is looking for something expensive, a villa with a sea view.

Sainsbury (2018): Adjectives are not existentially committing

But no account given within substitutional or higher-order analyses:

1. a. Some vindicating instance of ‘Sue is ---’ is not uncommon?

b. For some F, Sue is F and F is uncommon?

Additional problem for substitutional and higher-order analyses with embedded causes Factivity effect with *nice* modifying special quantifier:

1. a. Sue said something nice, that Bill is talented. (not factive)

b. That Bill is talented is nice. (factive)

##### 5.2. Quantifier restrictions 2: relative clauses

*What* may bind a position inside the relative clauses that is syntactically and semantically incompatible with higher-order expressions or values.

(39) a. Mary is something I admire *e* a lot, courageous.

1. Bill is everything Mary likes *e* in a man.
2. Joe is something I hate *e*, sloppy.

Relative pronoun does not originate in predicate position!

(39) d. I like what John has become, very athletic.

### Special quantifiers in clausal complement position

1. John said something that caused an uproar. (again, not factive!) Relative pronoun originates in a position not accepting clausal complements:
2. a. John said something I really do not like *e*.

b. John said something I would strongly object to *e*.

#### c. John believed something we never talked about *e*.

#### Special quantifiers as complements of intensional transitive verbs

(42) a. John needs something that is hard to get *e*.

b. John needs something that I have never seen *e* anywhere.

Relative pronoun does not originate in intensional quantifier position!

**5.3. Identity statements**

### Clausal complements of attitude verbs (Moltmann 2003b, 2013)

1. a. ??? John thought what Bill claimed, that it will rain.
   1. ??? John thought everything that Bill had claimed.
   2. John claimed what Bill claimed.
   3. John thought what Bill thought.
2. a. ??? Joe hoped what Bill claimed, that it will rain.
   1. ??? Joe fears what Bill wrote, that it will rain.

Shared object not a propositional content, but a claim, a thought, a hope, a fear: an ‘attitudinal object of kind of such an object.

Complements of intensional transitives (Moltmann 2013)

Apparently no need for a shared attitudinal or modal object:

1. a. John needed what he now has, a house.
   1. John needs what he is looking for, a computer.
2. a. ?? John needs what Mary painted, a house.
   1. ?? John is looking for what Bill recognized, a genius.

### The shared object of intensional transitives (verbs of absence: *need, look for*)

Not a need or search, but ‘the satisfaction of a need’ or ‘the satisfaction of a search’

The satisfaction of a need: objects in situations satisfying the need

= *variable satisfiers* of the need

In (45a): a (possible) house in a situation satisfying John’s need = a house John has In (45b): a (possible) computer in a situation satisfying John’s need = a computer in a situation satisfying John’s search.

Restrictions on direct quotes :

(47) a. ??John whispered what Bill said, ‘wow’

b. John whispered what Bill whispered, ‘wow’.

(Products of) phatic acts (Austin 1961) need to be the same, not quotes as such.

**5.4. Quantificational complements of intensional transitives**

### Substitutional account intensional transitives

(48) a. John needs something.

b. Some vindicating instance of ‘John needs ---‘ is true.

### Higher-order account of intensional transitives

1. a. John needs something.

b. For some Q, need(John, Q)

Invalid inferences with intensional transitive verbs (Zimmermann 2006, Moltmann 2013) Invalid inference from (50a) or (50b) to (50c):

1. a. John needs at most two vaccines.

b. John needs no vaccine.

c. John needs something.

### Solutions to the problem

Zimmermann (2006): *Something* quantifies over properties that are the exact match of the need.

Moltmann (2013): *Something* ranges over variable satisfiers of the need.

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#### 6. The Nominalization Theory of special quantifiers

**6.1. The Nominalization Theory in its general form**

### (51) The Nominalization Theory of special quantifiers

Special quantifiers range over the very same entities that a corresponding nominalization

would stand for.

### With attitude verbs

Special quantifiers range over *attitudinal objects* or kinds of them (claims, thoughts, assumptions etc.).

With copular verbs:

Special quantifiers range over *tropes* or kinds of them (happiness, sloppiness, wisdom, …).

With intensional transitives

Special quantifiers range over *variable satisfiers*: functions from a satisfaction function to a (possible) object meeting relevant conditions in the the satisfaction situation

With verbs of saying taking direct quotes

Special quantifiers range over *utterances* - phatic objects (‘sayings’).

What the view leaves open

How do special quantifiers manage to range over such objects?

### Two options

1. Special quantifiers introduce a ‘new domain’ of entities that would not have been present in the semantic structure without the special quantifier.
2. Special quantifiers pick up on the denotation of an underlying noun.

### Semantics of special quantifiers with attitude verbs

Option 1: my older work (neo-Russellian semantics of attitude verbs Moltmann 2003, 2013)

Option 2: more recent work (Moltmann 2021): with connections to syntactic proposals by Kayne (2010), Harves/Kayne (2012), and Arsijenevic (2009)

### Attitude reports based on lexical decomposition: Arsijenevic (2009), Moltmann (2021)

Attitude verbs derived from light verb-noun combinations

(52) a. John claimed that S.

b. John made (the) claim that S.

c. John made [claim [that [e +ass] S] ]

d. John claim-made ~~claim~~ [that [[force~~claim~~ +ass] S]]

Harves/Kayne (2012) *need* = *have need*, and Hale/Kayser (2002) for lexical decomposition of verbs in syntax more generally (*walk* = *take a walk*).

### Special quantifiers with attitude verbs

The light noun -*thing* is a classifier applying to a a nominal from which the attitude verb is derived.

1. a. John claimed something.

b. John claim-made [some thing ~~claim~~-thing]

c. \* [proposition claim], \* [object claim]

### Verbs of saying with direct quotes

Direct quotes as predicates of phatic objects (utterances)

(56) a. John said ‘wow’.

b. ∃d(make(John, d) & saying(d) & [‘wow’](d))

(57) a. John said something.

b. John say-make some thing ~~say~~.

c. \*[noun say], \*[expression say]

### Carrying the view over to intensional transitives

(58) a. John needs2 a computer.

* 1. John have need2 for a computer.

(59) a. John needs2 something.

* 1. John have some need2-thing.
  2. John need-have some ~~need~~2-thing.

Special count quantifiers in place of definite plurals: reification

(60) a. John ate two things, the beans and the peas

b. For some d and d’, for some xx, for some yy, John ate xx, John ate yy, thing(d, xx),

thing(d’, yy)

Special quantifiers with intentional verbs:

Hypothesis: fictional characters (which, intuitively, ‘exist’), are reifications of nonexistents.

No, special quantifiers with intentional verbs still range over entities that have the status of nonexistents:

(61) John thought about something that does not exist.

Reason:

The distinction between nonexistents and fictional characters resides in that only fictional are part of a piece of fiction that ontologically depends on an agent’s intention of creating it (Moltmann 2024).

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