Tautologies with proper names: interpretation, conveyed attitude, rhetorical relations

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Agenda

- ➤ In the literature it is argued that nominal tautologies with proper names (TPNs) have several interpretive strategies and perform particular discourse functions.
- ➤ These properties induce a number of constraints on contexts in which tautologies are encountered.
- ➤ We check these predictions against the naturally occurring data from the viewpoint of the theories of discourse structure.
- ➤ We demonstrate that TPNs show clear tendencies with respect to their interpretation and a wider range of functions than suggested in previous work.

Outline

1. Background: TPNs in previous studies.
2. Data, methodology, and framework (Jasinskaja and Karagjosova 2015).
3. Discussion of findings: interpretation TPNs and their role in discourse.
4. Conclusions.

Tautologies with proper names (TPNs)

(1) a. A mother is a mother.

b. Holidays are holidays.

c. Madonna is Madonna.

Grice, 1975; Levinson, 1983; Fraser, 1988; Escandell-Vidal, 1990, in press; Gibbs and McCarrell, 1990; Ward and Hirschberg, 1991; Farghal, 1992; Okamoto, 1993; Apresjan, 1995; Miki, 1996; Autenrieth, 1997; Bulygina and Shmelev, 1997; Bulhof and Gimbel, 2001; Paducheva, 2004; Meibauer, 2008; Rhodes, 2009; Kwon, 2014; Snider, 2015; Vilinbakhova, 2015; Vilinbakhova and Kopotev, 2017; Vilinbakhova and Escanell-Vidal 2019, 2020.

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Background

➢ **TPNs do not evoke linguistic knowledge**

▪ Proper names "do not indicate or imply any attributes as belonging to the individuals".

(Mill, 1843)

▪ Proper names are "rigid designators". (Kripke, 1972)

▪ "Proper names lack descriptive content and are detached from the semantic network in which conceptual knowledge is represented".

(Brédart, 2016)

Taxonomy of nominal tautologies

(2) a. Paderewski is Paderewski. (Kripke, 1979)

b. "How's Uncle Max?" I asked.

"What should he be? Uncle Max is Uncle Max." (Miki, 1996)

c. First things first.

d. Tyranny is tyranny. (ex. c and d are from Bulhof & Gimbel, 2001)

Tautologies establishing identity

Implicature-based tautologies

Tautologies-pointers

Deep tautologies

Bulhof and Gimbel, 2001, 2004

Taxonomy of nominal tautologies

Tautologies establishing identity

(2) a. Paderewski is Paderewski. (Kripke, 1979)

Bulhof and Gimbel, 2001, 2004

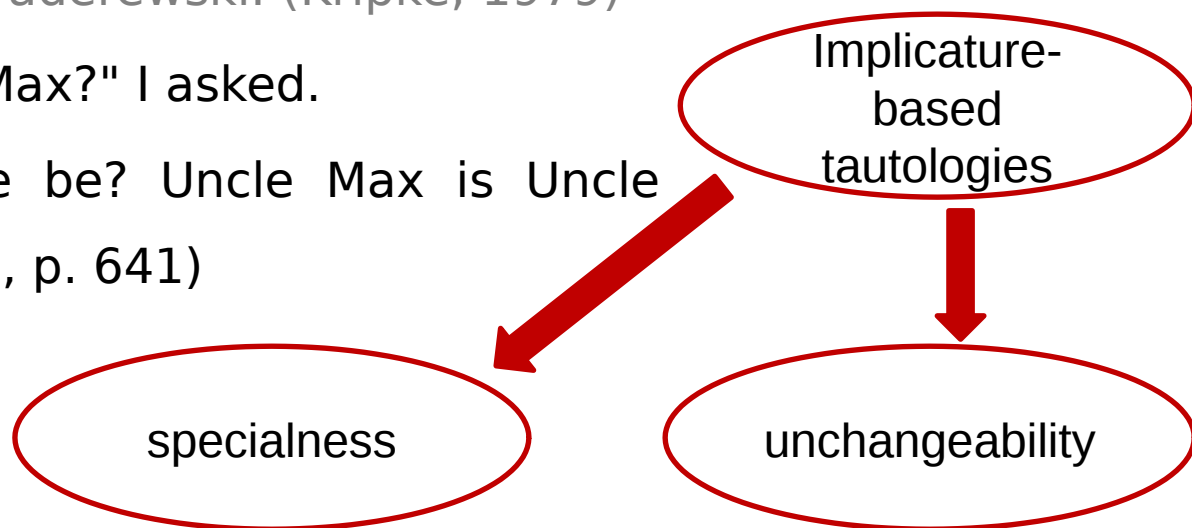**Taxonomy of nominal tautologies**

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Implicature-based tautologies

specialness

unchangeability

Bulhof and Gimbel, 2001, 2004; Bulygina and Shmelev, 1997

Background

- **TPNs involve specific referents**

- Proper names are "descriptions with unique denotations".
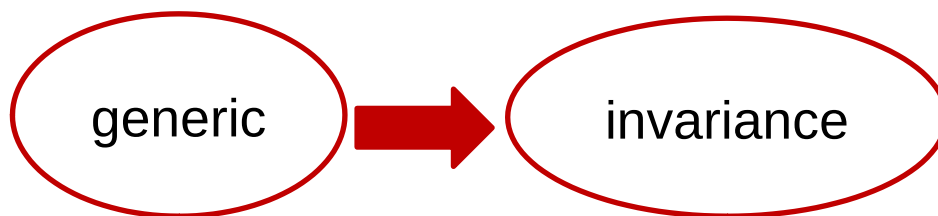

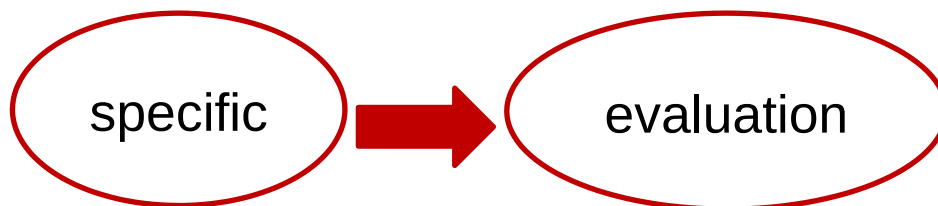Van Langendonck and Van de Velde, 2016

➢ **TPNs involve specific referents**

(3) a. <u>Bush</u> is Bush.

    b. <u>People</u> are people.

specific ➡ evaluation

generic ➡ invariance

▪ "In case of the reference to a **specific** entity, the reading is **evaluative,** i.e. **negative or positive**, otherwise, tautologies convey a reading of category **immutability**".

Farghal, 1992; Kwon, 2014

➤ **TPNs involve human referents**

Human roles

(4) a. Fathers are fathers.

b. A promise is a promise.

Abstract nouns

c. #A carrot is a carrot.

Concrete nouns

▪ "Although people know a good deal about concrete objects, they do not usually have **specific stereotypes that polarize either negatively or positively**, their **attitudes** about these objects".

Gibbs and McCarrell, 1990

➢ **TPNs exhibit less syntactic variation that tautologies with common nouns**

Table 1. Formal properties and the interpretation of nominal tautologies.

FORMAL PROPERTIES	INTERPRETATION
N_{abstr} is N_{abstr}	'realism' in human affairs
$N_{hum.pl}$ are $N_{hum.pl}$	tolerance for human nature
A N is a N	tolerance at special times
A $N_{hum.}$ is a N_{hum}	seeing through superficial differences
N_1 is N_1 and N_2 is N_2	recognizing an irreducible difference
(ART)N is (ART)N	tautologies of obligation tautologies of value

Wierzbicka, 1987, 1991

- **Nominal tautologies, including TPNs, are strong arguments, because they are necessarily true**

  - "If the predicate repeats a bare noun, then the identity of the subject and the predicate is obvious, so **it must be obvious to everyone that the claim made by the speaker is valid**".

Wierzbicka, 1987

➢ **Nominal tautologies, including TPNs, are employed to convey the message implicitly**

▪ "The speaker can **capitalize on the avoidance of explicit mention of shared assumptions**, **in order to make the hearer look, or to frame him, as if he were endorsing the speaker's particular views** about some referent that the hearer would not necessarily endorse himself, if he knew the exact contents of those views".

Miki, 1996

➢ TPNs have three interpretive strategies:

  (a) establishing referential identity;

  (b) indicating special status;

  (c) pointing to the unchangeability of the referent.

➢ TPNs are expected to convey evaluative reading.

➢ TPNs are strong arguments because of their literal thuthfullness.

➢ TPNs are employed to convey the message implicitly.

Data

Messi is Messi

100 tautologies with personal names

- 27 examples for sportsmen
- 25 examples for celebrities
- 25 examples for politicians
- 23 examples for intellectuals (writers and scientists)

Annotation I

- SOURCE: magazines, newspapers, spoken, books, Internet texts (comments in forums, chats, tweets, etc.)
- STATUS: The four groups to which the referent belonged (celebrities, politicians, sportsmen, intellectuals).
- INTERPRETATION: (a) Special (SP) (b) No change (NCH) (c) Identificational (ID).
- EVALUATION: (a) positive (POS), (b) negative (NEG) and (c) neutral (NEU).

Annotation II

- RR_Prec: The rhetorical relation of the tautology with the preceding discourse: Elaboration (E), Explanation (X), Result Contrast (C), Parallel (P) and Narration (N).

- RR_PRole: The role of the tautology with respect to the preceding context. Two situations are possible: the tautology is either Nucleus (N) or Satellite (S) of the RR.

- RR_PMark: The occurrence of a specific discourse marker overtly indicating the RR between the previous discourse and the tautology. The absence of marker was also annotated.

Annotation III

- RR_Foll: The rhetorical relation of the tautology with the discourse fragment following it. The categories are the same as for RR_Prec. The absence of subsequent discourse units was also annotated.
- RR_FRole: The role of the tautology with respect to the following context.
- RR_FMark: The occurrence (if any) of a specific discourse marker overtly indicating the RR between the tautology and the following discourse.

Framework

Jasinskaja and Karagjosova's proposal

➢ Six rhetorical relations based on Hume's principles:

- Resemblance relations: *Elaboration*, *Parallel*, 'semantic opposition' type of *Contrast*

- Contiguity in space and time relations: *Narration*

- Causal relations: *Explanation*, *Result*, 'denial of expectation' type of *Contrast*.

➢ Taxonomy supported by real data in the domains of connectives and anaphora.

David Hume (1711-1776)

Jasinskaja and Zeevat, 2008; Jasinskaja, 2009; Jasinskaja and Karagjosova, 2015

Jasinskaja and Karagjosova's proposal

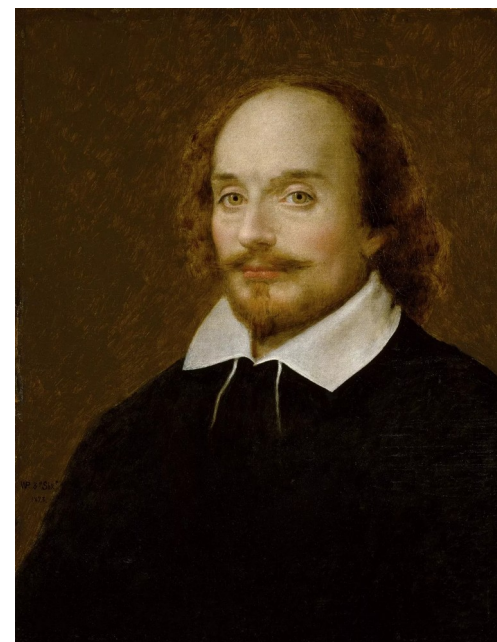| Structure	Relation	Markers	Principle
Subordinating (Mononuclear)	Elaboration	*i.e.*	Resemblance
	Explanation	*because*	Causality
	Result		
Coordinating (Multinuclear)	Contrast	*but*	
	Parallel	*also, too, like, as*	Resemblance
	Narration		Contiguity

Figure 1. Rhetorical relations.

Tautologies establishing identity

(5) "I recall when my old friend Joe Sobran was hot on the trail of the real identity of Shakespeare. He would invite me over to his house and go on for hours showing all his evidence that it was Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford. He made an incredibly convincing case. So I asked a genuine Shakespeare scholar who I trust, who put his hand on his forehead and shook his head, saying simply "That's completely ridiculous. **Shakespeare is Shakespeare**."

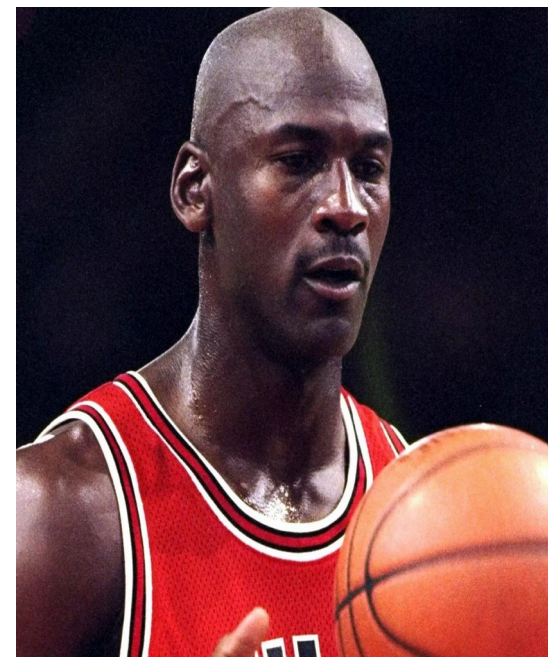(https://www.forbes.com/sites/jeffreytucker/2018/10/21/i-dont-want-to-know-satoshis-real-identity/#3ed821062247)

Implicature-based tautologies pointing to the special status of the referent

(6) How is Dwyane Wade the closest thing to Michael Jordan? If anyone is the closest player to Michael Jordan, it would be Kobe Bryant or LeBron James. But, in the end, we all know that **Michael Jordan is Michael Jordan**. No one will ever come close to what he accomplished.

(https://bleacherreport.com/articles/1211293-skip-bayless-10-worst-basketball-arguments-from-the-past-few-years#slide1)

Implicature-based tautologies pointing to the unchangeability of the referent

(7) Yes, Kanye West is arguably the most famous rapper on the planet, so by default everything he does is going to be covered, because people are interested in him and what he does. But unlike say Jay Z, with his carefully manicured public image, or Drake, who despite his emotional lyrics is an entertainer first and a public personality second, **Kanye West is Kanye West**, for better or worse, at all times. If he's going to release a song, you're going to know that it was the best song he was capable of creating at that current moment.

(https://www.vice.com/da/article/rbqym6/the-kanye-west-guide-to-life)

General tendencies for TPNs' interpretive strategies

➢ Implicature-based tautologies represent the most prevalent case, with a total aggregate of 86%.

➢ The difference between tautologies pointing to specialness and unchangeability is characteristic to the subclass of TPNs with famous people: it is the originality and distinctiveness that make a person stand out and become famous,

➢ Identificational tautologies show a much lower frequency. This result is consistent with the observations found in the literature for tautologies with common nouns.

TPNs involved in rhetorical relations

Figure 2. Tautologies in coordinating rhetorical relations.
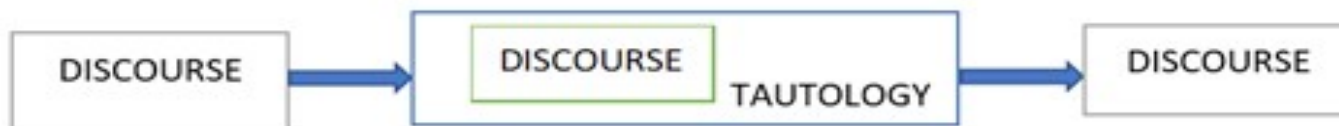

Figure 3. Tautologies as nuclei in subordinating rhetorical relations.

Figure 4. Tautologies as satellites in subordinating rhetorical relations.

TPNs in coordinating RR

(8) Christie didn't write as many Miss Marple short stories as she did Poirot stories, but this book was more expensive than the Poirot collection and is slightly disappointing as it features arguably less good quality stories overall. Having said that, **Christie is Christie** and even at her worst, the plots are clever and engaging.
(https://www.amazon.co.uk/Miss-Marple-Mystery-Complete-Stories/dp/0007284187)

Contrast
[this book <...> is slightly disappointing as it features arguably less good quality stories overall]NUC [Having said that, Christie is Christie]NUC

TPNs in coordinating RR

(9) Coming off last week's Celebrity Apprentice triple-dog-dare firing by Trump, Team Leeza/Vivica/Geraldouche hear the phone in the suite ring – which it has never done before! – and they are called back into the now very empty boardroom. Trump tells them about his slight breach of etiquette of bypassing the individual firing for a group firing. Then **Trump is Trump** by making them all beg for their jobs since he's decided he's going to fire someone else!
(https://www.trashtalktv.com/02/10/celebrity-apprentice-recap-and-then-there-were-two-ish/346853/)

Narration
[Trump tells them about his slight breach of etiquette of bypassing the individual firing for a group firing]NUC Then [Trump is Trump by making them all beg for their jobs since he's decided he's going to fire someone else!]NUC

TPNs in coordinating RR

(10) <Bolt's> ascension has brought and will continue to push more talented Jamaican youth to the sport. <...> The hunt will begin in earnest for the 'next Bolt', but in truth, **Bolt is Bolt**; quite like **Jesse Owens was Jesse Owens** - irreplaceable, incomparable. (http://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/sports/20170611/final-sprint)

Parallel
[Bolt is Bolt]NUC quite like [Jesse Owens was Jesse Owens-irreplaceable, incomparable]NUC

TPNs in coordinating RR

(11) But Lady Gaga is Lady Gaga, and she will never do something just because someone else has and saw success (unless you're talking about Madonna and chord progressions). In fact, Gaga has first dibs on Abramović, and perhaps Jay Z was actually emulating her. (https://www.theblot.com/lady-gaga-gets-the-marina-abramovic-treatment/)

Result
[Lady Gaga is Lady Gaga]NUC, and [she will never do something just because someone else has and saw success]NUC

TPNs as nuclei in subordinating RR

(12) "I think this makes Nashville uniquely positioned to do something that has not traditionally been done," Hurt told WTVF. "I mean, Oprah is Oprah! She is one of the most influential people in the world."
(https://kdvr.com/2018/12/14/nashville-politician-proposes-renaming-airport-after-oprah)

Elaboration
[Oprah is Oprah!]NUC
[She is one of the most influential people in the world.]SAT

TPNs as satellites in subordinating RR

(13) Johnny Depp has been melting women's hearts for almost 40 years. Women forgive him everything they usually don't like in a man. Alcohol. Mumbling. Silver teeth. Yes, even his torn jackets. Why? Because Johnny Depp is Johnny Depp.
(https://www.adam-themagazine.com/en/johnny-depp/)

Explanation
[Women forgive him everything they usually don't like in a man. Alcohol. Mumbling. Silver teeth. Yes, even his torn jackets] NUC
[Because Johnny Depp is Johnny Depp.]SAT

General tendencies for TPNs in rhetorical relations

- ➢ There is a significant number of TPNs as second (winning) conjuncts of *Contrast*, or premises in *Explanation.*
- ➢ This is consistent with the observations about the argumentative force of tautology employed by the speaker to impose or justify his position.
- ➢ There is a significant number of examples where TPNs are nuclei in *Elaboration* RR followed by a clarifying satellite.
- ➢ It shows that the claim from the previous accounts about the implicit evocation of common knowledge as the important benefit of the usage of tautologies does not always hold.

Possible explanation for TPNs as nuclei in the RR of *Elaboration*

- ➢ In cases where tautologies co-occur with sentences that overtly express the conveyed meaning, they emphasize the veracity of the transmitted message.
- ➢ Tautologies present the information in a satellite as part of the established common ground, and hence, beyond dispute, and as such, function similar to general knowledge evidentials.
- ➢ **Oprah is Oprah** in (12) signals something along the lines 'We all know how Oprah is' followed by the proposition 'She is one of the most influential people in the world'.

Hintz and Hintz 2017; Eberhard 2018; Kittilä 2019

Positive evaluation

(14) That is incredibly hard to do when your opponent is 6'8" and bombs serves up to 140 mph. But **Federer is Federer**, and if there's a Superman in tennis, he's it.
(https://www.bettorsinsider.com/tennis/2019/03/29/tennis-abrams-picks-the-miami-open-mens-semis-federer-vs-shapovalov-isner-vs-fa2)

Negative evaluation

(15) Most Democrats know the lingo and will say that gender is a "spectrum." That's a-scientific nonsense, but it at least allows them to skirt the issue by including every possible "identity." **Joe Biden is Joe Biden** though, so that means he was bound to give the worst possible answer.

(https://www.redstate.com/bonchie/2019/08/10/biden-says-least-three-genders-confusing-everyone/)

No evaluation

(16) **Vettel is Vettel** and **Michael was Michael**, yes, but he does remind me of MS. So while he may not be the next Schumacher, he could very well be the start of a new era- which is something I've believed for quite a while, now, long before his debut in '07.

(https://forums.autosport.com/topic/107959-vettel-really-is-the-next-schumacher/page-2)

No evaluation

(17) People are always trying to expose her secret agedness – her hands look old and gnarly, her costume is too young, her lovers are too young, she should have moved on from pop by now and she really should not be posing topless any more. In truth though, **Madonna is Madonna** – always has been, always will be. Expecting her to stop being Madonna because she's now too old to be herself and should start finding some other person to be … well, it's a bit unrealistic.
(https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/feb/28/madonnas-fall-doesnt-make-her-ancient)

General tendencies for TPNs transmitting evaluation

➢ The requirement of conveyed evaluation found in previous studies is not supported by the data.
➢ For tautologies with human roles and referring to specific entities, considered as prototypically expressing the speaker's attitude (Gibbs and McCarrell, 1990; Farghal, 1992; Kwon, 2014), the lack of evaluation is not only possible, but quite common.
➢ Pragmatic roles of tautologies are more diverse and heterogeneous than claimed in the previous studies.

Conclusions

> TPNs can have different interpretations, pointing to the uniqueness of the referents, their unchangeability and identity. Identificational tautologies are least frequent, similar to the attested distribution of tautologies with common nouns.

> TPNs exhibit no constraints on the RRs in which they are involved: *Contrast*, *Parallel*, *Narration*, *Result*, *Elaboration* and *Explanation*.

> TPNs can co-occur with the explicit verbalisation of the transmitted messages.

> TPNs do not specialise in conveying an evaluative attitude.

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Thank you!

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