

# 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

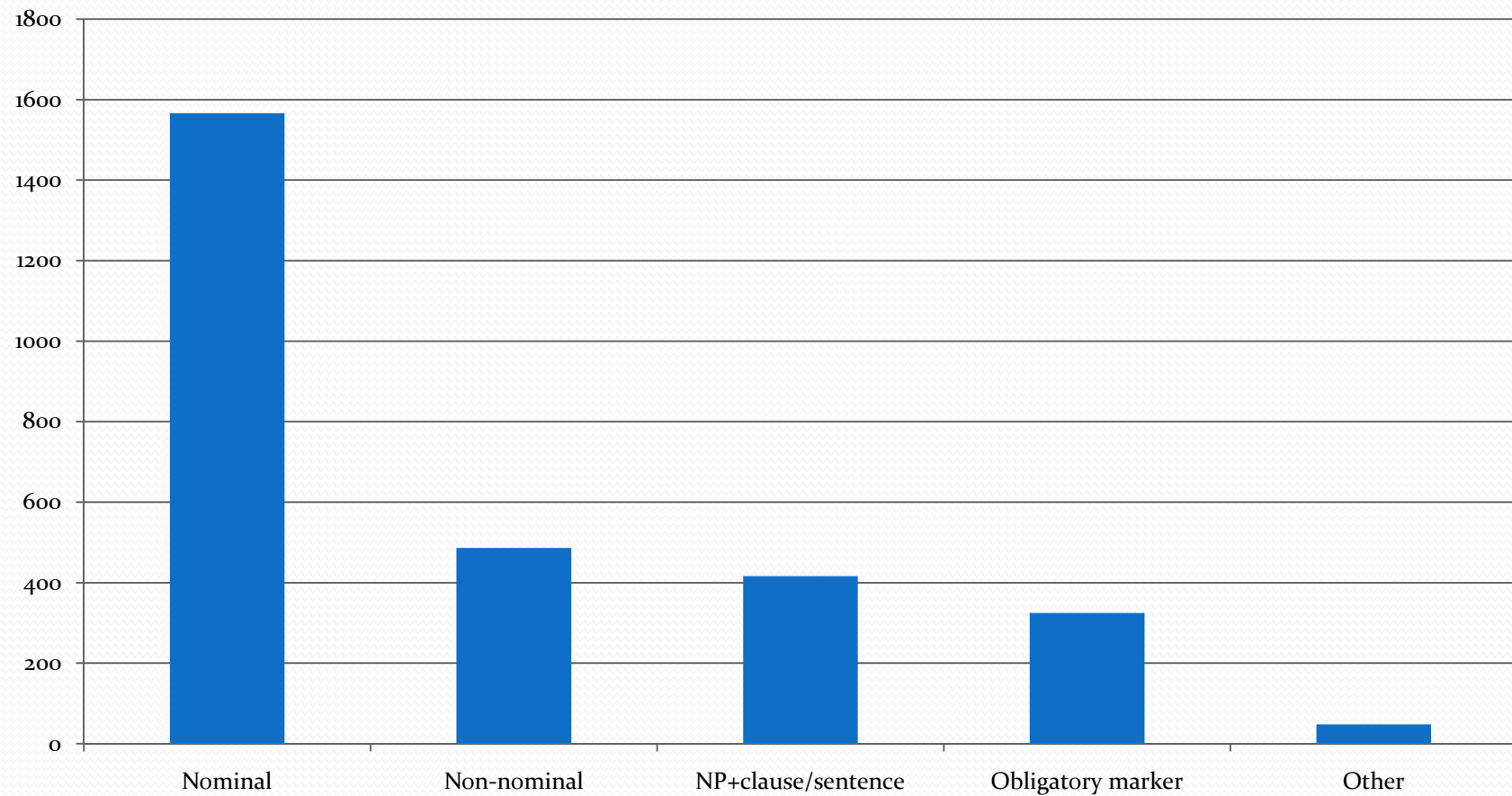
- See handout #3



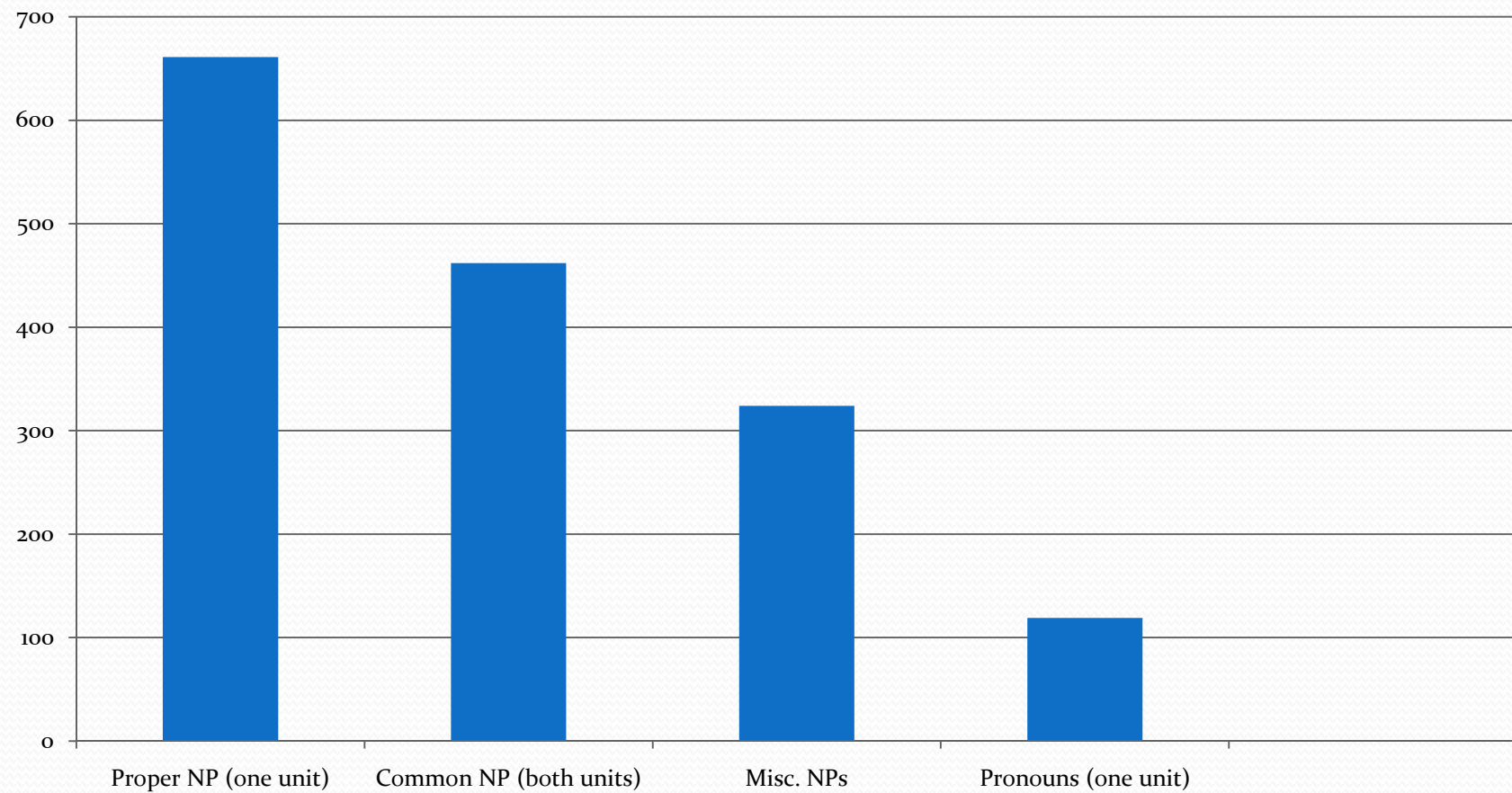
## Corpora consulted in Meyer (1992)

- 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

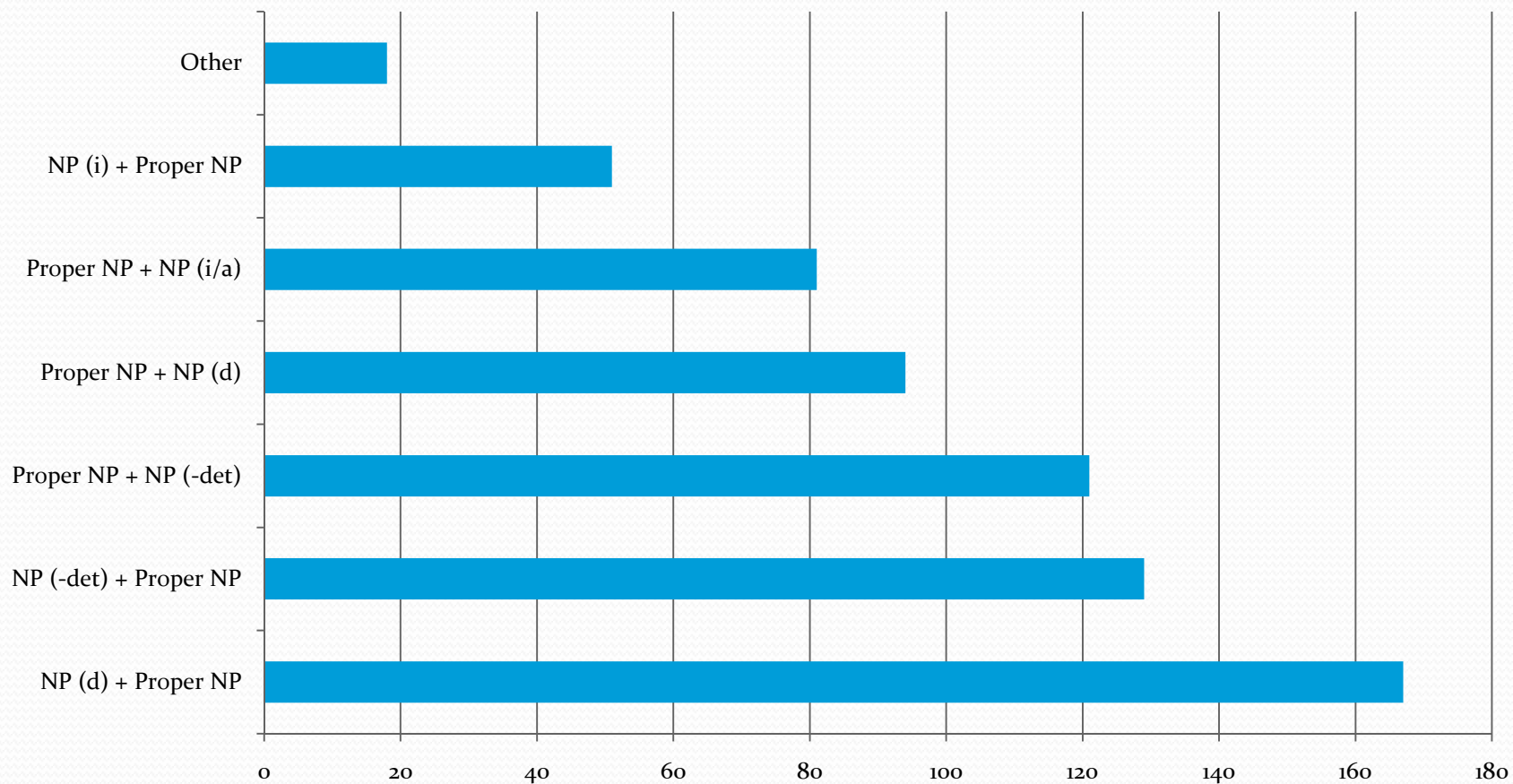
# Forms of appositions (raw frequencies)



## 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
<b>Fiction</b>		
SEU	24 (0.6)	35 (0.9)
Brown	19 (0.4)	40 (1.0)
Total	43 (0.5)	75 (0.9)
<b>Conversation</b>		
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)
<b>Learned</b>		
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)
<b>Press</b>		
SEU	89 (2.2)	147 (3.7)
Brown	179 (4.4)	147 (3.7)
Total	268 (3.4)	294 (3.7)
<b>Total</b>	<b>357 (1.0)</b>	<b>450 (1.25)</b>

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