

A TAUTOLOGY IS A TAUTOLOGY

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The paper aims to examine if the meaning of colloquial 'tautologies' in English and Greek corresponds directly to the content of the tautological proposition expressed in logic as $A=B$. The non-violation of the reasonableness conditions, by a structure which at first sight —and not only— seems to state the obvious, suggests that a more 'subjective', a notional specification of meaning should be pursued. It is precisely such an account which distinguishes the definitivization of the repeated element of the structure, through profiling of substructures, and sheds some light as to the basis of the generated implicatures.

1. The issue

The association of traditional grammar and logic has been long and close. This is evidenced by some of the terminology of traditional grammar, such as 'subject', 'predicate', 'mood', etc., which is also used in logic. The question arises if the existence of similar terminology indicates that there is more than a historical association between the two disciplines¹. The relevant issue dealt with here concerns 'tautological'² expressions in language. The paper³ aims to examine if the meaning of the so-called colloquial 'tautologies' in language corresponds directly to the content of the tautological proposition expressed in logic as $A=B$. More specifically, if there is more to the meaning of a 'tautological' sentence than its propositional content. The present paper is limited to nominal 'tautologies' of the NP_i be NP_i type⁴.

1.1 Hypothesis

Given that the reasonableness conditions are not violated when these structures are used, and that the maxim of quantity is in operation, we are led to the hypothesis that the communicative significance of the structure extends beyond its propositional con-

1. See Lyons (1981, 119).

2. The term is within quotation marks in the cases the reference is to language. No quotation marks are used in the cases the reference is to logic.

3. This is a revised form of a paper presented at "The third Symposium for the Description and Comparison of English and Greek", organized by the University of Thessaloniki.

4. The paper does not address the questions whether the points made here apply also to other types of 'tautologies', such as e.g., 'Either he will come or he will not come'.

tent, since it does not seem to be restricted to the statement of the obvious, which blatantly violates the maxim of quantity. Moreover, the numerous implicatures conveyed by such constructions cannot be read off the relevant truth conditions. A tautology, according to Kalish — Montague (1964, 717), is a symbolic sentence whose truth value is T, with respect to every possible assignment. It appears then, that if a propositional account fails to describe the content of this kind of sentences, a non-truth conditional approach, a conceptual approach should be pursued. It is exactly such an approach followed in this paper, for the examination of this issue in English and Greek. In what follows I will first give an account of the different theories that have been proposed for the structure under examination.

One popular view concerning the meaning of 'tautologies', as was mentioned above, is that they are patent, 'tautologies', and so necessarily true. Their meaning which is identified with their logical form can be informally stated as follows: "For every entity that it is true to say that it is an x, it is true to say that it is an x". Here the structure NP_i be NP_i corresponds to the formula P=P. However, as has already been indicated, utterances of this type convey more.

1.2 Context and metalanguage

Levinson (1983,111) observes that such 'tautologies' are necessarily true and that the differences that lie between them, as well as their communicative import, must be due to their pragmatic interpretations. He claims that an account of how they come to have communicative significance can be given in terms of the flouting of the maxim of quantity, if the assumption that the speaker is actually co-operating is to be preserved. In the case, for example of *War is war*, it must be "terrible things always happen in war, that's its nature and it's no good lamenting that particular disaster". Levinson adds that sentences of this type share a dismissive or topic-closing quality, but the details of what is implicated will depend upon the particular context of the utterance. He concludes that exactly how the appropriate implicatures in these cases are to be predicted remains quite unclear, although the maxim of Relevance would probably play a role.

Wierzbicka (1987,101) claims that utterances like *War is war* are context-independent⁵. She objects (96) to the account that such constructions should be calculable from some language independent principles⁶, on the basis of the fact that some English 'tautological' constructions do have literal counterparts in other languages, but are used in the latter with a different communicative import. This suggests for her (96) that the communicative import is conventionally encoded in a given language, and that instead of a 'radical pragmatics', in which meaning would be explicated exclusively in terms of universal pragmatic principles (cf., e.g., Cole 1981), a 'radically semantic' approach to the task should be advocated: the constructions in question have a language-specific meaning, and the meaning should be spelled out in appropriate semantic representation. Thus, to explain the partly conventional and language-specific character of 'tau-

5. Grice (1975, 52), too, discusses the 'conversational implicatures' of such sentences without involving any particular context.

6. According to Levinson (124), among other things, a sentence like *Boys are boys* is necessarily true. According to Wierzbicka (29), it is an attitude which can hardly be called 'true' or 'false'.

tologies', she submits a semantic metalanguage derived from natural language. She describes it (103) as follows: "...the proposed method of analysis consists in paraphrasing the word expression, or construction under consideration in a metalanguage based on intuitively intelligible natural language, and couched in simple terms; this makes possible a precise comparison of both the similarities and the differences between different concepts". Before leaving Wierzbicka's account attention should be drawn to what she claims, indeed admits, about the role of lexical meaning, in this case *war* (101): The lexical meaning of the word *war* may indeed influence the 'implicature' of the saying *War is war*⁷; but this doesn't mean that the construction itself is similar in meaning to *Boys are (will be) boys*. To the issue of the lexical role of the nominal we will return later on. For the moment let us give a sample of Wierzbicka's analysis (105):

A 'SOBER' ATTITUDE TOWARD COMPLEX HUMAN ACTIVITIES

N abstr. is N abstr.

Examples: *War is war*, *Politics is politics*, *Business is business*, **Wind is wind*, **Sneezing is sneezing*, **Wars are wars* the above structure is formally represented as follows:

A. Everyone knows that, when people do things of this kind (x), they have to cause some bad things to happen to other people.

B. I assume that I don't have to say what things.

C. When one perceives that such bad things happen, one should not cause oneself to feel something bad because of that.

D. One should understand that it cannot be different [cannot be changed].

The above treatments, even though enlightening for the issue, are far from explaining how 'tautologies' function. In what follows I will first examine individually if the components of the metalanguage are valid, pragmatically, and then I will proceed to examine them as a whole.

To take just a sample of Wierzbicka's account, doing *business* is not equally 'bad' as doing *war*, if it is bad at all. It is not even for anti-business minded people, not to mention others.

Doing *business* is an established societal excuse for acting in certain ways, and people in general need such excuses, whether in the business-world or otherwise. Naturally, and with reference to the second component, B, a 'tautology' is followed by relevant information, especially in the case of the given example, and with grandfather/grandson as interlocutors. Finally a prompt of the *war* kind 'tautology' is used to divert people from resorting to such activities, which if effective would make things different⁸.

The second way to examine the metalinguistic substructures is as wholes. Assuming, for the sake of the argument, that the individual components that constitute the substructures are acceptable, which they are not, the set of potentially relevant assumptions would be coincident with the set of facts and beliefs held by participants as to what constitutes 'tautologies'; but what would be the end, in such a case, of the metalanguage substructures?

In a short notice⁹, Fraser (1988, 217) criticizes Wierzbicka's paper and proposes an

7. I have changed the characters to italics so that they fit with the rest of the context.

8. Some kind of ambiguity may be involved here. If this is the case, it is not the kind of thing one would expect to find in primitive substructures of this kind.

9. I thank Dr. M. Sifianou for bringing this paper to my attention.

account that assumes the following systematic and conventional meaning associated with these constructions:

An English nominal 'tautology'¹⁰ signals that the speaker intends that the hearer recognize

- a) that the speaker holds some view towards all objects referenced by the NP,
- b) that the speaker believes that the hearer can recognize this particular view,
- c) that this view is relevant to the conversation.

Metalinguistic in its nature, like Wierzbicka's, Fraser's proposal does not assign detailed illocutionary force potential to 'tautological' sentences, which allows him to avoid some of the discrepancies of Wierzbicka's account. However, his account, it seems, suffers from excessive generality. One wonders if the same conditions couldn't be invoked for other discourse types as well. Whatever the case may be, it is correct, to the extent it is, in its excessive generality. Two points, I think, should be mentioned in passing. First, the point about the recognition by the hearer of the particular view put forward by the speaker. The opaque context of b) implies a recognition level which in the case of a 'tautology' being the result of a philosophical mood constitutes the act of a monologue rather than anything else. The second point concerns the view held by the speaker towards all objects referenced by the NP. It is unfortunate that Fraser does not elaborate on this view, which, as will be shown presently, may be a central issue. By not paying attention to the content of the nominals, not much can be said, and indeed is said, about the legitimacy of stating the obvious, and therefore about the communicative significance of 'tautologies'.

In what follows I will try to make my own contribution in the quest of an invariant, because this is exactly what we are after.

2. The quest for an invariant

The problem with the establishment of an invariant, I think, is that the more complex is attempted to be understood without having established an understanding of the basic elements in the relevant structures. There are two basic parameters involved in the 'tautologies' examined. One is the fact that repetition is involved, and the other is the determiners¹¹ and their combinatorial possibilities that accompany the structures. The first is related to Wierzbicka's concern about the 'lexical meaning of a word influencing an implicature'. Definitely, it appears, the 'lexical meaning of a word' does not make the same sense when repeated, rather than said once, and this, as will be shown, is especially true in the case of 'tautologies'. But we will return to the issue later. That the two parameters are related to each other, is not irrelevant to my choice to examine them together. I will first take repetition.

Repetition creates rhythmic patterns¹². Repeating a word or phrase, or longer syntactic unit—exactly *vor* with variation—results in a rhythmic pattern which sweeps up the interlocutors with an emotional effect. Besides the logical connection involved, an emotional effect is also present. Emotion and repetition as Bateson (1984), Friedrich (1986), and

10. The quotation marks are mine, as specified in an earlier footnote.

11. This refers to the definite and indefinite articles in this context.

12. For this view and a review of the relevant literature see Tannen (1987).

Tyler (1978) suggest can be seen as inseparable in that the cognitive effect of comprehension is facilitated by the emotional effect that is created. Another effect of repetition is that, as Derrida (1976) points out, each time a word or phrase is repeated its meaning is altered. In the light of the accretion or juxtaposition created, the question arises as to what exactly is the alteration of meaning. Ochs et al. (1979, 256-57) observe that repetition used by children between the ages of one and three, interacting with each other and with caretakers, is used as an 'attention-getting strategy'. If 'definitiveness' is the effect of repetition in adult language, as well, can be easily tested. Our choice, naturally, is to test it in the context of 'tautologies'. As a matter of fact, the more definitive a sentence is, the more difficult it is for it to appear in a 'tautological' construction. The following examples illustrate the point:

- (1) a) Professors are professors
- b) ?Tenured professors are tenured professors
- c) *Tenured professors who have been at the university for more than fifteen years are tenured professors who have been at the university for more than fifteen years

The same situation appears to hold in the equivalent sentences in Greek. The same kind of increased definitiveness appears to hold in the case of 'tautological' constructions with indefinite determiners:

- (2) a) A professor is a professor
- b) ?An old tenured professor is an old tenured professor
- c) *A tenured professor who has been at the university for fifteen years is a tenured professor who has been at the university for fifteen years

The same situation again appears to hold in the equivalent sentences in Greek. Definitiveness, then, appears to be the result of repetition, and 'tautological' sentences are no exception to this. If definitiveness is already there, there is no ground for a noun phrase to appear in the context of a 'tautology'. The repeated element of 'tautological' sentences, then, appears to be more definitivized than its first occurrence. A generalized concept then (first occurrence of the nominal), appears as definitivized in its second occurrence. Cognitive semantics can accommodate this relationship.

2.1 A conceptual account

The concept of 'imagery' has been used by Langacker (1987a) to construe a cognitive domain in alternate ways. Any cognitive structure — e.g., a novel conceptualization, an established concept, or a knowledge system — can function as the domain for a predication. Predications are taken to be semantic structures which are characterized relative to cognitive domains. The 'scope' of a predication is that portion of relevant domains which it invokes and requires for its characterization (cf. Casad — Langacker 1985, Langacker 1985, 1987). Various dimensions of imagery must be accommodated, the most important being what Langacker (1987a, 56) calls the 'profile/base' distinction: "The BASE for a linguistic predication is its domain, i.e. the cognitive structures it presupposes; its PROFILE is a substructure of the base that is elevated to a distinctive level of prominence, as the entity which the expression DESIGNATES. Expressions often invoke the same domain, but contrast semantically by choosing alternate profiles within the

same base". A predication typically invokes multiple domains, which characterize different aspects of the profiled entity. The inventory of domains as well as the ranking for relative prominence determine the semantic contrasts.

A basic assumption we have made in this paper is that the second occurrence of the nominal (the predicate nominal) is definitivized. If this assumption is correct, naturally it entails that its first occurrence is less or non-definitivized. It appears then that by the first occurrence of the nominal, out of a base constituted of multiple domains, a substructure is elevated to a distinctive level of prominence. This profiling constitutes now in its turn the base for the profiling of the second occurrence of the nominal. Again, a substructure of the new base is elevated to a distinctive level of prominence. Thus, there seems to be a feeding relationship between the two occurrences of the nominal, which specifies a conceptual contrast between them. The above theory can account for the subtle meaning relations that I have described in 'tautological' structures. In *A mother is a mother*, for example, the scope of predication would be the rest of the family relations, while the base would be formed from input from multiple domains that contribute to the conceptualization of *mother*. Of the two consecutive profilings, the second one elevates to a higher rank of relative prominence a substructure composed of stereotype characteristics of *mother*.

This brings us back to Wierzbicka's intuitive digression (101) from her line of thinking that the "lexical meaning of the word 'war' which may indeed influence the implicature of the saying *War is war*": definitivization of lexical items may be actually the factor that brings forth the relevant implicatures of 'tautological' expressions. What is profiled is the stereotype aspects of the meaning of *mother*. Similarly, this analysis substantiates Fraser's claim (217) that "the speaker holds some view towards all objects referenced by the NP".

I have already shown that repetition is connected with definitivization. Earlier I claimed that definitivization and the parameter of the determiners are not irrelevant. I will return to this issue after I have placed the count/mass distinction in the same cognitive framework, by using data from English and Greek.

Langacker (63) observes that a count noun designates a region that is bounded within the scope of predication within its primary domain. A mass noun, on the other hand, designates a region that is not specifically bounded within the scope of predication in its primary domain¹³.

3. Contrastive remarks

My contrastive remarks will be brief and selective, and on the line of reasoning of this paper. A list of the basic 'tautological' patterns in the two languages would facilitate the task:

3) War is war	N abstr. is N abstr.	3') <i>O polemos ine polemos</i> ¹⁴
∅ ∅		art./def ∅

13. That in which the different instantiations of the category can occur and be identified.

14. The stress over the example number indicates Greek example.

		Npl. are Npl.	
4)	Children are children ∅ ∅	4')	Ta peδja ine peδja art./def. ∅
5)	Children will (always) be child. ∅ ∅	5')	?Ta peδja θa ine (panda) peδja art./def. ∅
		A N is a N	
6)	A party is a party art./ind. art./ind.	6')	Ena parti ine ena parti art./ind. art./ind.
		The N is the N	
7)	The law is the law art./def. art./def.	7')	*o nomos ine o nomos art./def. art./def.
8)	The prime minister is art./def. the prime minister art./def.	8')	o proθipuryos art./def. ine (o) proθipuryos art./def.

It appears then that definitiveness develops in 'tautological' structures regardless of the determiner (zero determination included) of the noun phrase. The interaction, however, of definitiveness with the form of the structure varies depending on the determiner. This may explain the asymmetry of occurrence of determiners in 'tautological' structures, that exists in the two languages. A closer look at the behavior of determiners in the two languages, in relevant contexts, would further support the understanding of the account that is pursued in this paper.

Zero article before abstract nouns denoting material things or abstract ideas, functioning as grammatical subjects, is possible in generic statements in English, as in examples (9) and (10):

- (9) Man is mortal
(10) Time flies

The use of the definite¹⁵ article in generic statements may be said to be generally restricted in English. Besides its specific reference, the definite article has a generic use, referring to what is general or typical for a whole class of species, or objects. This is found with count nouns:

- (11) The tiger is a beautiful animal

Here the definite article indicates the class of tigers, and not one specific tiger. No article, however, is used if the noun phrase is in plural:

- (12) Tigers are beautiful animals

Proper nouns such as names of people, cities, countries etc., take no article in English¹⁶.

15. For a contrastive view see Kakouriotis (1988).

16. A notable exception is proper nouns which are normally antecedents to relative pronouns in non-restrictive relative clauses: "I want the Mr. Smith who works at the bank".

(13) New York is a beautiful city

In Greek, on the other hand, zero determiner is not used for the expression of generic meaning, for either material things or abstract ideas. This meaning is conveyed by the definite article and it is general for the whole class of people, objects or abstract entities.

(14') ο άνθρωπος ine θnitos

(15') ο xronos perna

Unlike English, the definite article is used before proper names of people, cities, countries, etc.:

(13') i nea iorki ine orea polis

The indefinite article is used in English, on the other hand, before a singular countable noun, which is used as an example of a class of things:

(16) A tiger is a beautiful animal

Sentence (16) expresses essentially the same meaning as (11) and (12). (11) is the generic use of the definite singular; (12) is the general use of the plural indefinite form. Even though (11) and (12) are generic, the difference between them is that *the tiger* (generic) is used to focus on the species via any individual member, arbitrarily chosen¹⁷. Thus, (17) is acceptable, but (18) is not:

(17) The tiger is in danger of becoming extinct

(18) *A tiger is in danger of becoming extinct

As in the case of the definite article, there is a difference in the way the indefinite article is used in the two languages. In Greek its use is more limited compared to English. With a generic meaning, the indefinite article is used in Greek to denote a property which is typical or characteristic of an entity. It is thus acceptable to say (19), but not (16), which is absolutely acceptable in English:

(19') Enas epistimonas pote den stamata tin erevna

(19) A scientist never stops researching (meaning a good scientist)

(16') *mja tiyris ine oreo zoo

(16) A tiger is a beautiful animal¹⁸

Correspondence of generic meaning with indefinite genericness to a sentence with definite genericness is usually possible in Greek, but not always possible in English. Observe the correspondence of (20') to (21') vs. (20) to (21):

(20') ena pedi xriazete ayapi

(21') to pedi xriazete ayapi

(20) A child needs love

(21) *The child needs love (unacceptable as generic).

17. See Marmaridou (1984, 103) for this view, and an analysis of genericness attribution and reference.

18. Correspondence is represented here only for the noun phrase in subject position.

Thus, even though the definite article is used to convey generic meaning in both languages, in Greek it is more systematically connected with genericness, and its use is broader, as it takes up the role of conveying the generic meaning conveyed by zero article as well as a case of indefinite genericness¹⁹.

3.1 Why asymmetry

With the above observations in mind, we can go on with the consideration of the role of determiners in 'tautological' structures, and in particular the asymmetry that the two languages exhibit with regard to the combinatorial possibilities of determiners. This will be done in connection with the definitivization process, and with reference to the given patterns.

We may start by summarizing the combinatorial possibilities of determiners in 'tautological' structures in the two languages. Both languages allow definitivization with indefinite as well as definite determiners in the context of 'tautologies'. In English the same determiner has to be repeated, and this is true for zero determination, as well as definite and indefinite determiner. In Greek, on the other hand, zero determination is not possible in the first occurrence of the noun phrase, while it is possible in its second occurrence if the first noun phrase has a definite determiner. Indefinite determiner is also possible in both occurrences of the noun phrase. In both languages then, repetition of the definite determiner is possible, a case with a strong definitivization. The latter characterization will be used henceforth when referring to this case.

The question arises then is that if a given noun phrase, in either language, can take the definitivization 'charge' of its being exposed in the context of a 'tautology'. As shown earlier, both languages exhibit the strong case of definitivization. However, due to the different input the process receives in the two languages, the way they go about achieving it is different. A look at the 'tautological' patterns provided would illustrate the point.

In Greek the definite determiner is repeated in the more referential case (8'), unlike English where it is repeated in a non-referential case as well (7). (7') is unacceptable because the coexistence of the definite article with the definitivized concept developed results in the meaning of uniqueness found only in a referential interpretation. In other words, the slot for the second occurrence appears to be reserved for noun phrases that express uniqueness, as (8), or proper names. This may happen because the definite determiner cannot take the 'charge' of the definitivization process. Thus, zero determination introduces the predicate noun phrase in such cases. This solution appears to be forced by the fact that the indefinite determiner, being relatively incompatible with genericness, does not allow some cases of definitivization:

- (22') ?mja mana ine mja mana
 (22) A mother is a mother

The relative unacceptability of (22), compared to English at least, is due to the fact that definite genericness would fit better in this context, as (23) indicates:

19. Naturally the correspondences are not exact in the two languages.

(23') *i mana ine mana*

The structure is reserved in Greek for cases like (24'), where matters such as the significance or insignificance of the entity definitivized, or its effect is implicated, rather than its typical properties:

(24') *enas polemos ine enas polemos*

(24) A war is a war

In English, on the other hand, where genericness is more systematically related with the indefinite determiner, definitivization is welcomed by more cases of indefiniteness and individuation, leaving thus the definite article the exclusive role of the strong definitivization process²⁰. This appears to be the case, in view of the fact that some of the genericness burden is taken by the zero determination possibility in the two noun phrases. Understandably, a conceptual process like the one I have come to call 'definitivization' process in this paper, is a matter of complex sociocognitive parameters. This would explain the interesting contrast concerning the 'law' case in the two languages, as well as cases of noun phrases which do not appear in 'tautological' structures, simply because no profiling of substructures is possible, necessary or socially established. In the line of reasoning of this paper we can contemplate that the fact that certain noun phrases do not undergo the definitivization process may be less resistant to change than are what I have come to call 'symmetry' contrasts in the two languages, which are connected with more general structural/conceptual issues.

4. Conclusion

The apparent structural contrasts are naturally, and as shown, accompanied by conceptual contrasts. One can go as far as to claim that in some cases there are no conceptual counterparts between the two languages. We can restrict ourselves to a statement to the effect that an approach of this type transcends the (language) structures under examination, and we will dare ask the question: Shall we continue calling them tautologies? In fact are they tautologies?

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20. The case of definite genericness in English cannot not instigate the 'tautological' pattern with definite determiner in the noun phrase and zero determination in the predicate noun phrase, like in Greek, because of the analogies — it is a rather marginal case —, and it cannot affect more general processes. On the other hand, it may be unlikely that one would want to profile features of classes as such.

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