

“Something that’s very American”: The Interactional Role of Light-Head Relative
Clauses*
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Barend Beekhuizen
University of Toronto

Sandra A Thompson
University of California
Santa Barbara

Abstract

In this paper, we examine a specific type of Relative Clause (RC). We look at the construction consisting of a ‘light noun’, i.e., a noun with highly non-specific lexical content which does not do referential work, plus a relative clause. It has generally been assumed that the functional contribution of RCs is to narrow the set of referents of the head noun to only those for which the predicate of the RC holds true. However, the ‘Light Head RC construction’ (LHRC) has various interactional affordances that mostly revolve around characterizing referents with discourse-relevant properties rather than establishing reference. We argue that these various functions of LHRCs revolve around participants’ orientations to categoryhood. Data are in English and Dutch.

1. Introduction

Interactional Linguists are interested in seeking explanations of why grammars are the way they are in terms of the “contingencies of real-time talk in interaction” (Fox 2007). In this paper, we consider the interactional contributions of relative clause constructions (RCs¹) in Dutch and English, two languages that have similar relative clause constructions. In particular, we consider **indefinite, restrictive relative clauses with a ‘light’ head noun**, as in:

- 1) that sounds like **something he would do**. [SBC 015]
- 2) maar dat doe je dat doe je niet zo snel met
but that do you that do you not so readily with

mensen die je niet kent.
people that you not know.
'but you won't do that so readily with **people you don't know**' [CGN
fn000415]

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By convention, we will use the abbreviation ‘RC’ in this paper to refer to the relative clause **construction**, consisting of a head noun and a relative clause, and not just to the relative clause itself.

‘Light Head-Relative Clause Constructions’ (LHRCs) are of interest because their two components (a light head noun and a relative clause) have been analyzed to have opposing functions. It has generally been assumed that the functional contribution of RCs is to narrow the set of referents of the head noun to only those for which the predicate of the RC holds true (Berk 1999:265; Biber et al. 1999:603; Radden and Dirven 2007:161; Quirk et al. 1985:1239), often without much evidence for this position. However, as Fox & Thompson (1990a, b) show, RCs have various interactional affordances: they allow interlocutors to make novel referents relevant by anchoring them to established discourse referents, to introduce novel referents while maintaining membership-category-relevant expectations, and to characterize a referent with discourse-relevant properties. In contrast, the literature on light nouns suggests that nouns like *person* and *thing* mostly carry out functions other than reference (Biq 2004; Mahlberg 2003; Sinclair 1999). Mahlberg (2003:100) suggests that light nouns frequently display a ‘support function’: a light noun “helps to present information according to the communicative needs of the speaker/writer and hearer/reader.” Our goal in this paper, then, is to consider LHRCs in conversational language use and to analyze what they can tell us about why speakers use RCs in general. We will show that LHRCs display a range of interactional functions beyond ‘narrowing the set of referents’. These various functions, we argue, revolve around participants’ orientations to **categoryhood**: LHRCs formulate a novel category, and that status as a novel-category formulation device underlies their patterns of interactional usage.

2. Our data

In considering LHRCs, we restrict our attention here to those “light nouns” that are used to describe people and things (the two most frequently occurring classes in our data):

- 3) *iets* // *something*
ding(en) // *thing(s)*
iemand // *someone, somebody*
mens(en) // *person, people*

Our RCs were culled from transcripts of naturally-occurring audio- and/or video-recorded conversations. All of the participants are native speakers of American English or Netherlandic Dutch. The Dutch data were automatically extracted from the syntactically annotated part of the Corpus Gesproken Nederlands (Corpus of Spoken Dutch; henceforth CGN)² and manually checked for accuracy and completeness. The English data were collected manually from private corpora, consisting of more than 20 hours of everyday conversations among family and friends. Our collection includes 157 Dutch LHRCs and 77 English LHRCs,

3. LHRCs invite participants to orient to **categoryhood**

² See <http://lands.let.ru.nl/cgn/> for more information.

As opposed to most literature on RCs, our data show that LHRCs are rarely used to establish or narrow down a discourse referent. In many cases it is dubious whether the LHRCs are used referentially at all; in fact, nearly all our examples of LHRCs seem to function instead to establish and present an ‘ad hoc category’, i.e., a **novel category of things or people** (Barsalou 1983, 1991). The formulation as a category, in turn, affords various interactional possibilities that are in line with the literature on light nouns, but at odds with the referential function given in the RC literature.

For example, consider the Dutch extract in 4):

4) Don’t like – CGN file fn000724

[Tine is describing getting frozen snacks at a supermarket for an outing]

- 1 Tine: ik stond ook met een mevrouw -
I was standing (there) with a lady -
 {3 lines of story background omitted}
- 2 die vrouw die zag mij in dat vriesvak grabbelen,
the woman she saw me rummaging in that freezer compartment
- 3 ik zeg ja, opdracht hè.
I said: yeah, assignment, you know.
- 4 nou <x zeg ze x>.
wow, she says.
- 5 ‘k zeg en dat zijn dan **dingen die ‘k zelf niet lust**.
*I say and so those are **things I don’t like myself**.*
- 6 en daar moet je d’r dan dertig van kopen.
and so now (look) I have to go buy thirty of them.

In lines 3 and 5, Tine reports what she said to the woman she was talking to. Here, the contribution of the relative clause *die ik zelf niet lust* ‘that I don’t like myself’ (line 5) is not easily seen as a ‘restriction of the referential range’ of the head noun *dingen* ‘things’. But what **does** it contribute? We understand this extract as building on Tine’s assumption that the woman inferred that Tine must like this particular frozen food item, as suggested by her report that the woman saw her *grabbelen* ‘rummaging’ in line 2, and getting a large number of these items in line 6. That she doesn’t like this item, conveyed by the LHRC in line 5, can then be understood as a denial of the inference that Tine is attributing to the woman, which is further supported by Tine’s characterization of what she is doing as an *opdracht* ‘assignment’ in line 3, and as something she ‘has to’ do (line 6).

LHRCs, we argue, offer a useful grammatical pattern to express such an evaluative stance, because they present a state of affairs as a **category**. Asserting that the frozen food items belong to the category *dingen die ik zelf niet lust* ‘things I don’t like myself’ formulates the negative stance as dependent on an independently existing property of a category of things in the world, which in turn supports the strength of the stance: the speaker’s dislike of this item is presented as not just ‘accidental’ and ‘subjective’ (as a main clause formulation like *ik lust die dingen zelf niet* ‘I don’t like those things myself’ would be), but as ‘essential’ and ‘objective’, and thereby less open to negotiation.

Such interactional affordances, we argue, are made accessible by the way in which interlocutors interactionally treat the property of being a category. In particular, our data suggest that interlocutors are operating under a ‘commonsense model’ of categoryhood that includes the following. First, in people’s commonsense model, categories have ESSENCES: unobservable properties that make them the way they are and that exist independently of us as perceivers of those categories. Through these essences, categories also have AFFORDANCES: ways in which they relate to goals, desires, and other subjective, relational states obtaining between the category and us. Finally, through essences again, categories have EXTENSIONS: any instance of the category has the essential attributes of the category, whereas all non-instances lack the essential attributes. This, in turn, allows us, upon hearing an LHRC, to consider the set of people or things that are members of this category, in other words: the extension.

While all of these properties have been theorized in philosophy and linguistics as relevant aspects of what categories are like (e.g., Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* for essences (Ross 1924), Gibson (1979) for affordances, and Frege (1884) for extensions), here we instead consider them primarily as aspects of a commonsense model: a culturally shared “organized body of considered thought” (Geertz 1983:75). On this view, our oriented-to conception of categoryhood and the use of this conception in interaction are co-constitutive: essences allow us to talk in terms of timeless, subjectless truths, affordances allow us to negotiate goals and desires as they pertain to referents that have such essences, and extensions help joint reasoning about the existence of category instantiations. It is to an exploration of these aspects of categoryhood and their various interactional functions that we turn next.

4. *Category formulations can be motivated by Essences*

Essences are properties that are stable across time and that are definitional for the category (Gelman 2003; Medin 1989). As such, they deal with the criteria or conditions under which we can call something a member of a category. In its simplest form, we see the employment of LHRCs to orient to a category’s essence in definitions. In fragment 5), Tom explains the difference between a teaching assistant (in a university context) and a *co-assistent* (resident in a medical context):

5) [RAs and residents. CGN file fn000276]

1 Tom: een co-assistent dat is iemand die in ‘t ziekenhuis werkt
 volgens mij.
 a *co-assistent*, that is **someone who works in the hospital** I
 think.

As noted in Sidnell (2016), the definitional formulation ‘NP is RC’ is a grammatical format that allows interlocutors to resolve trouble concerning lexical knowledge, as is the case in 5). We add to this analysis that predicated LHRCs are also well-suited for doing definitions because they present the lexical knowledge as a case of category assignment, with the LHRC **formulating a category**. As categories are understood by speakers to have essences, predicating something to be an instantiation of a category means

attributing the category's essence to the referent. An alternative formulation of Tom's utterance as a main clause predicate (*een co-assistent werkt in het ziekenhuis* 'a co-assistent works in the hospital') would characterize what a *co-assistent* **does**, but would fail to invoke what a *co-assistent* **is**.

Extract 6) is analogous: again, in response to a question-word question, Virginia's LHRC (line 8) is designed to embody the criterial property of 'gwaffs', that they are 'really immature'. In this case, the formulation as a category can be shown to be sequentially relevant when comparing the formulation in lines 8-9 with an alternative formulation as a predicated adjective (*a gwaff is just really immature*). This alternative formulation, by naming just one characteristic of gwaffs, fails to respond appropriately to the question in line 6, which asks for a definition. In line 9, then, we see that the formulation as a category, but not the formulation as a predicate adjective, allows Virginia to refer back to the categorical status of 'gwaff' with the anaphoric *like that* (shaded).

6) [Virginia, age 14, is justifying going out with people older than she is] [Virginia]

1 VIR: ALL THE REST OF MY: PEOPLE MY AGE ARE GWAFFS. I promise.
2 they are si:[ck].
3 MOM: [they're what?
4 (.)
5 VIR: GWAFFS.
6 PRU: what's a gwaff.
7 (3.1)
8 VIR: **gwaff is just somebody who's really (1.1) I just- ehh! `hh**
9 **s- immature.** >you don't wanna hang around people like tha:t.<

In extracts 5) and 6), speakers support their formulations of definitions by orienting to the conception of categories as immutable and invariant. We find further evidence for the fact that the orientation to categoryhood is 'real' for interlocutors in extract 7) below. Here, a small family group has been discussing running marathons. Betsy, an American who has been living in Europe, offers her impression of the activity of running marathons.

7) Very American 1 - Marathon Chat: 21

1 B: this whole concept of marathon
2 whatever racing or
3 whatever
4 seems to be **something that's- very American**
5 B: you don't find it in Europe at all
6 I mean granted [they have these bicycle] races
7 MSr: [well there are joggers:]
8 MSr: =sweetie there are [joggers
9 K: [yeah cycling I would think=
10 B:=yeah but **that's not the marathon concept**

After about 4 minutes of listening to the discussion about running marathons, Betsy's LHRC in line 4 suggests that for her, an essential and invariant characteristic of training for, and running in, marathons is how *very American* the whole activity seems to be. Betsy orients to the status of 'things that are very American' as a category, not just by

means of the predicated LHRC, but also by explicitly charactering it as *this whole concept* in line 13, that is, by choosing a noun that categorizes the topic under discussion as a category. This act of classification reorients the conversation to one jointly characterizing a **category**, rather than just jointly characterizing an **activity**.

Could Betsy have offered her opinion without an LHRC, i.e., with the clausal predicate adjective construction *seems to be very American*, instead of *seems to be something that's very American* (line 4)? We suggest that with the LHRC in line 4, she invites grouping running marathons with other 'very American' activities, like celebrating Thanksgiving, for example. Formulating the assessment of marathons as something that has the quality of being 'very American' with an LHRC doesn't just assert that marathons have that quality, but also presents the quality as being immutably present for this objectively existing category, similar to the 'things I don't like myself' in extract 4). A predicate adjective does not contribute this characterization, and is therefore less well suited to discuss marathon racing on a 'conceptual' level (which the speakers seem to orient to, as fragment 8) shows.

The orientation to a commonsense understanding of category essences also supports other discourse functions, as fragment 9) illustrates. This fragment presents the upshot of a story the couple Fred and Marit are telling their friends Sanne and Jos. When Fred and Marit were moving, they had left their washing machine unattended on the sidewalk. Coming down to check on it, Fred noticed a man loading it into a van. The man is reported as saying that he regularly looks through the trash for valuable things, and thinking the washing machine was trash. Fred and Marit wrap up the telling by jointly characterizing the man, and in response to a challenge from Marit, Fred incrementally characterizes the situation as a 'crime of opportunity'.

8) Washing machines [CGN file fn00716]

1 Fred: ja volgens mij wist ie donders goed dat 't niet uh ...
yeah according to me he knew damn well that it wasn't uh
2 maar ik denk d-
but I think th-
3 op zich denk ik niet dat dat 't **iemand was die echt uh (...)**
uh wasmachines uh stal zeg maar.
really I don't think that he was someone who really uh uh
stole washing machines uh let's say
4 maar -
but -
5 Marit: hij had ie wel zoiets van 't is wel een hele meevaller.
he was like that's a real windfall
6 Fred: [ja]
7 Sanne: [ja]
8 Jos: ja
9 Fred: ja volgens mij [volgens mij] was 't gewo was 't gewoon
echt ik denk gewoon echt op op zich geen uh niet **iemand die**
leefde van de [wasmachine] stelen,
@@@ yeah according to me according to me he just was he
just was really I think just really by itself no uh not

someone who was (making a) living off of stealing the washing machine

10 Marit: [@@@]
 11 Jos: [ja]
 12 Fred: maar (..) toen ie er een zag staan dacht van nou ja dit uh
 kan ik niet [niet uh @@@@].
*but when he saw one he thought like well yeah this uh I
 can't uh.*

13 Jos: [dit kan xxx]
 14 Marit: [@@@]
 15 Fred: dit kan ik niet laten staan.
this I can't leave alone

Starting the concession that he thought the man knew he was doing something wrong in line 1, Fred notices trouble with his acknowledgement of the man's bad intentions: the characterization of the man as 'knowing damn well that it wasn't right' makes accessible the possible inference that he was a thief. It is that inference that Fred seems to repair in line 3, by characterizing him as *niet iemand die echt wasmachines stal* 'not someone who really stole washing machines'. Here, the formulation with a plural indefinite and a simple past, *wasmachines stal*, licenses an interpretation as a habitual statement, but at the same time, an interpretation as a description of a past activity is not ruled out. The ambiguity of the formulation as having either a habitual or a simple assertion interpretation then leads him to self-repair the characterization in line 9 with another LHRC *iemand die leefde van de wasmachine stelen* 'someone who was making a living by stealing the washing machine'. Here, the habitual interpretation is made explicit in the formulation *leefde van* 'made a living by' and the generic understanding of the plural *wasmachines* 'washing machines' is underscored by a reformulation as a (somewhat unconventional) definite noun phrase.

This way, Fred achieves a formulation that ascribes bad intentions to the man, but by negating membership of the category 'someone who steals washing machines', presents it as accidental rather than essential. The LHRCs in line 3 and 9 orient the speakers away from the single act of taking the washing machine and towards a category of acts ('stealing washing machines') and an accompanying social category ('people who steal washing machines for a living'), which can then be negated. Looking at alternative grammatical formulations, we notice that a main clause formulation ('I don't think he really stole washing machines') further biases an interpretation towards an interpretation of a single sanctionable event. On the other hand, reformulating it as a predicated noun compound ('I don't think he really was a washing machine thief') presupposes that the lexical category of 'washing machine thief' is shared and accessible, which may not be the case.

5. *Category formulations can be motivated by affordances*

A second important aspect of the commonsense conception of categoryhood is that categories have characteristics that allow us to interact with them in certain ways, and for certain purposes. Adopting Gibson's terminology, we can say that interlocutors orient to the AFFORDANCES of category membership in talk. Relatedly, and applied to social

categories, such affordances have been observed as interactionally relevant in the framework of membership categorization analysis (MCA: Sacks 1972; Schegloff 2007). In MCA, social categories are understood to have **category-bound activities** (activities that the member stereotypically engages in), and are **inference-rich** (they index commonsense knowledge about what members of a category are like). But the research on MCA fails to address the question of which of many possible inferences we focus on; we aim to show that the category-bound activities and rich inferences that we as interactants associate with a category arise because they pertain to their relevance to us.

We find that category affordances are frequently oriented to through LHRCs. In a case such as extract 4) above, we saw that the LHRC *dat zijn dan **dingen die 'k zelf niet lust*** 'those are **things I don't like myself**' serves Tine's goal well in providing her with a category whose essential nature also helps her deny her recipient's possible inference that she is greedily buying excessive quantities of something for her own consumption. Notably, whereas **essences** are oriented to with LHRCs that occur as predicate nominals in their main clauses (as with *gwaff* in 6)), LHRCs that primarily make the **affordances** of categories relevant mostly occupy direct object and oblique positions in their main clauses.

Assumed inferences in fragment 9) can also be seen to motivate Jet's use of an LHRC:

9) Interview [CGN file fn000415]

- 1 Jet: 'k heb **iemand** gesproken **die al zo'n gesprek heeft gehad**
*I spoke to **someone who has already had such an interview***
2 en die zei dat het heel erg ontspannen was en gezellig.
and they said that it was very relaxed and convivial.

In this fragment, the LHRC in line 1 categorizes the referent in a way that is relevant for the goals of Jet, who is nervous about her job interview. The newly introduced referent is characterized as having already had such an interview, allowing for the commonsense inference that the referent of 'somebody' has the epistemic authority to talk about it (Heritage 2012a, b; Raymond and Heritage 2006). The relevance of this authority is oriented to in the second part of the coordinated clause in line 2: *die zei dat het heel erg ontspannen was en gezellig.* 'they said it was very relaxed and convivial'; the reported assessor has the right kind of experience to make the attributed assessment presented in the reported speech.

In terms of categoryhood, what we see here is that a novel referent³ is introduced as a member of a category ('people who have had a job interview with this particular company'), and that the category membership makes inferences accessible (that this person can speak to the issue of what the job interview is like). An alternative formulation, in which the informational content of the LHRC is split into two main

³ The fact that the LHRC here is referential may make one wonder if it wouldn't constitute a counterexample to the pattern we describe. We believe it does not: the purpose of the relative clause here is not to reduce referential uncertainty. In other words: the relative clause does not support any referential or extensional function, but rather a **predicative** or **intensional** function of constructing a novel category.

clauses is possible as well in both Dutch and English (as in ‘I spoke to someone. They had already had such an interview and they said that it was very relaxed and convivial’), but in this case, the introduction of the referent with *iemand/someone* without a relative clause, is less ‘useful’ to Jet for two reasons. First, drawing on Sacks and Schegloff’s (1979) argument that speakers design their turns so that recipients can recognize who they are referring to, we see that *iemand* ‘someone’ will not do for the work that Jet needs this clause to do, since it is a ‘non-recognitional personal reference’ (Sacks 1992, vol 2). This being the case, Jet’s clause ‘*k heb iemand gesproken* ‘I spoke to someone’, upon its production, would fail both to reveal its relevance to Jet’s previously stated concern about the upcoming job interview, or to project possibly relevant talk concerning the referent of *iemand*. Second, this non-LHRC clause would simply state that this individual has already had a job interview and then report on what they had said. Such a juxtaposition would of course allow for the inference of the epistemic authority from the statement that they have already had the job interview. But it would not situate that person as a member of a category of people whose characteristics grant them the epistemic authority to speak to Jet’s concern, thereby facilitating that inference, which is understood to follow from the new referent’s category membership.

An interesting property of the category presented by the LHRC in fragment 9) is that the category is ‘ad-hoc’ and ‘goal-derived’ (Barsalou 1991), as opposed to, for example, extract 6), where Virginia’s *gwaff* is presented as a category with characteristics that do not overtly relate the category to a goal. Barsalou characterizes **ad hoc categories** as categories that are formulated ‘on the fly’, and not accessible prior to their formulation, whereas **goal-derived categories** are categories whose criterial properties make reference to someone’s goals. In the case of fragment 9), the goal is implicit (the characterization of the *someone* as *having had such an interview* allows for the inference that they speak with authority on the matter), but in other cases, the characterization in the LHRC can formulate the goal itself. In those cases, a shared affordance of several objects or individuals becomes a defining feature of a category. We see such an example in 12):

12) Specific things [ChinDin]

[John is telling his friends Ann and Don about the ‘quit-smoking’ course he’s taking; Beth is his wife.]

1 JOH: and also they did a good thing like, ‘hh to:: to get you
2 through the wee:k,
3 (0.2)
4 BET: mm[hm?
5 DON: [yeah,
6 JOH: they have just **specific things to do each da:y**

John’s point is that the course emphasizes how to organize one’s life around other things besides smoking. John’s LHRC in line 6 designates a category that is made relevant in terms of not only the short-term goal of having something to do each day when the urge to smoke strikes, but of the long-term goal as well of quitting smoking and sustainably dealing with this urge.

6. Category formulations can be motivated by *Extensions*

The final property of categoryhood that is frequently made relevant by an LHRC is the fact that categories have extensions. In a commonsense conception, categories define sets of people and things that can appropriately be referred to with the category's label. Whereas an orientation to category essences and affordances selects the conceptual, or 'idea-like', character of a category, orientations to their extensions focus on the referential potential: are there entities in the world that this category can refer to, and if so, how many are there (compared to some other category)? This function seems similar to the referential function offered in the literature on RCs. However, we argue that the referential potential of an LHRC is instead derived from its formulation as a category rather than being its primary function. We find such orientations frequently in LHRCs that are subjects in existential clauses (and in related constructions such as the direct object of *to have*). Often, the extension of the category is oriented to as a way of introducing the (kinds of) people and things that fit the extension, as in fragment 10):

10) Flooding [Harvey 017]

[Sophia has been telling Taylor about 'Harvey', the major hurricane in Houston that flooded her parents' house, although the realtor who sold them the house had denied any previous flooding.]

- 1 SOPHIA: they said, 'hh has it ever flooded here, and then he said no.
 'hh when in reality,
 ... and,
 .. they found out,
 like a week or two after Harvey,
 this was like the s=ixth or seventh time the house has
 flooded.
 [so],
- 2 TAYLOR: [oh my] go:d.
- 3 SOPHIA: so my parents are still trying to pursue legal action
4 against that guy,
- 5 TAYLOR: [yeah:].
- 6 SOPHIA: [for .. lying]?
7 'cause you're ..not supposed,
8 .. **there are some things you're not supposed to lie about.**
9 (H) especially if they ask.
10 like, you don't have to disc- --
11 like you don't- ... have to disclose like deaths in the house.
12 TAYLOR: [yeah:].
- 13 SOPHIA: ['hh] but if someone asks you can't lie.
14 and they lied.

In line 1, Sophia asserts that her parents 'are still trying to pursue legal action against that guy', and in line 7, she starts to provide the motivation for her parents' case, as a main clause, after which she reformulates it as an existential clause with an LHRC in line 8. We attribute her reformulation to the fact that if she had continued with this main clause, 'you're not supposed to lie about some things', she would have failed to introduce those 'things' as the novel category 'things you're not supposed to lie about', on which her

parents' legal case rests. Critically, she goes on to exemplify the novel category by asserting that one doesn't have to disclose deaths in the house but one has to tell the truth if asked. As line 12 indicates, this is indeed the kind of instantiation of the novel category that Sophia wants to talk about, so we can interpret the orientation to the existence of the members of a category afforded by an LHRC formulation as providing the background knowledge for the discussion of the elaboration of the legal action Sophia's parents are pursuing.

In other examples, the formulation of a category having or not having members can be a vehicle for establishing local contrast. Consider fragment 11) below:

11) Meowing [fn000716]

[Jos and Sanne, a couple, are telling Fred and Mathilde, another couple, about their cat habitually meowing in the backyard at night]

1 Fred: hebben jullie nog geen klagende burenen?
don't you have complaining neighbours yet?

2 Fred: @@@

3 Jos: nee.
no

4 Sanne: zijn mis- ik denk wel dat er wel **mensen** zijn die wel blij
zullen zijn dat de kat xxx straks weg is ja.
*there may- I do think there are **people who are likely happy***
that the cat will soon be gone.

5 Jos: ja.
yeah.

6 Marit:@@@.

7 Jos: weet wel dat --
(I) do know that --

8 Fred: @@@.

9 Jos: de burenen die we --
the neighbours who we --

10 @@@ de burenen d'rnaast dus werden we --
the neighbours next to it so we got --

11 Marga vertelde ook wel dat ze d'r wel 'ns wakker van werd.
Marga did say that she was sometimes awakened by it.

12 Sanne: ja.

13 Marit:@@@.

14 Jos: maar maar die kon zich 't wel voorstellen.
but but she could imagine.

15 die had zoiets van nja xxx
she was like myeah xxx

16 dat kan ook niet anders.
it's the way it is.

17 dus uh die uh .. die wilde d'r verder niet over klagen.
so uh she uh didn't want to complain about it.

18 Sanne: ja maar ik heb wel 'ns een keer **iemand** gehad
yeah but I've had someone

19 **die zat zo van uh**
who was like uh

20 <Q nou uh 't is wel een schuinsmarcheerder hè die kat van
jullie.
"well uh it is quite a rascal, eh, that cat of yours.
21 is ie nou wel 'ns binnen?
is he ever inside?
22 is toch ook helemaal niet gezellig.Q>
that's not cosy at all.

In extract 11), we see two LHRCs. With the question in line 1 asking about instantiations of the well-established category of 'complaining neighbours', Sanne concedes in line 4 that another, similar, category might exist, namely *mensen die wel blij zullen zijn dat de kat straks weg is* 'people who are likely happy that the cat will soon be gone'. This LHRC introduces a novel, highly particular category (involving reference to a specific cat and a specific event of moving), which supports an interpretation of contrast between the two categories: the 'complaining neighbours', who are said not to exist, and the 'people who will be happy that the cat will soon be gone', who might exist⁴. The two categories are similar in inviting the inference that the neighbours are unhappy about the cat, but they differ in whether the neighbours express their unhappiness about the cat's behaviour. A reformulation without an LHRC (*sommige mensen zullen wel blij zijn als de kat straks weg is* 'some people will be happy that the cat will soon be gone') would fail to support this contrastive interpretation, as the two important elements of the contrast (the kinds of neighbours and their existence) are not presented as being at issue: the existence of the category is relegated to a nominal quantifier like 'some' and the future happiness of the neighbours is not formulated as a category-defining property, but as an accidental state of affairs.

Sanne's concession involves the assertion of the existence of an adjacent category (cf. Mazeland et al. 1995), which allows the interlocutors to then orient to the members of this adjacent group, as Jos does in his telling of their neighbour Marga in lines 7-17, who was awakened by the cat, but who was also understanding about the situation. Marga is paraphrased as 'not wanting to complain about it', a formulation directly contrasting with the original formulation of the category of 'complaining neighbours' in line 1. Sanne then introduces a second neighbour in lines 18-22 as another concession to the weaker category of 'unhappy neighbours' This neighbour did express a less-than-positive assessment of the cat, but the quoted formulation of the assessment is not an overt complaint; the cat is just humorously said to be *een schuinsmarcheerder* 'a rascal'. Again, this specific case is formulated as an LHRC, thereby presenting a specific communicative event as an instantiation of another adjacent category (as indicated by the existential-like formulation *ik heb wel 'ns iemand gehad die...* 'I've had someone who').

7. Discussion

In the previous sections, we have shown how LHRCs are frequently used to allow speakers to make the category-like status of a state of affairs interactionally relevant. We presented three facets of interactants' commonsense conception of categories and demonstrated how they recruit them for interactional purposes. Our analysis of LHRCs

⁴ See Deppermann 2005 for further discussion of the local achievement of contrast.

contrasts with the function typically assigned to RCs in general, namely to restrict the referential scope of the head noun's referents. In our interactional data, the properties of LHRCs are better explained by interactional and intersubjective functions, which we argue are derived from the way interactants perceive categories as being 'out there'. This should not come as a surprise: light nouns more generally are known to be used for such functions (Biq 2004; Mahlberg 2003; Sinclair 1999). That a lexico-grammatical construction predominantly fulfils such a role raises some further questions which we explore in this section.

7.1 Further motivations for LHRCs?

The starting point of our work was a reconsideration of the function of relative clause constructions, in particular those with light nouns as their heads. A first question is how complete the account we propose is. In other words: are all the LHRCs we encounter in our data explained by an orientation to categoryhood? Since the interactional functions we discuss in this paper are non-exclusive, non-determinate, and hard to classify into discrete classes, quantifying the coverage of our account does not seem to be an appropriate method to answer this question. We consider instead other possible functions of the LHRC and discuss their occurrence in our data.

We did not find cases of LHRCs fulfilling exclusively a referential function. A plausible case can be seen in extract 12) :

12) Poer [CGN fn000523]

- 1 Bert: een poer is toch zo'n zo'n uitsteeksel uh --
a 'poer' is like a protrusion uh --
- 2 Fien: xxx-ste uitstekend bouwwerkje om een balk op te vangen ja ja.
xxx-ste protruding little construction to catch a beam yeah yeah.
- 3 Bert: zo'n **ding wat we in de kamer hebben** hè?
*like one of those **things that we have in the living room,** right?*

Bert and Fien are trying to establish what a *poer* 'foundation block' is. Bert gives a definition by ostension by referring to a specific object he and Fien both know; the LHRC thus actually restricts the referential range of 'things' to only those 'we have in the living room', which, combined with Fien's background knowledge of the kind of things they are trying to establish (where TVs, furniture, etc., have already been ruled out) should suffice for her to identify Bert's referent. Such cases are, however, vanishingly rare in our data.

However, we occasionally do find LHRCs being motivated by other functions as well. In particular, the fact that LHRCs contain CLAUSES, and the information-structural affordances that being a clause offers may motivate formulation as LHRC as well. An NP with a relative clause facilitates more lexical material, adverbials in particular, which in turn allows LHRCs to fulfil functions such as contrasting and expressing epistemic and evaluative stance in a way that non-clausal NP modifiers, such as adjectives and

prepositional phrases, do not. In fragment 13), we see a good example of a speaker finding the clausality of an LHRC working to her advantage:

13) Snakes [Farmhouse]

- 1 Mom: it was a big one. He was wound around...
2 Lau: oh, yeah. freak me out - I am not a snake [person].
{6 lines omitted, talking about a Bible verse mentioning snakes}
8 Lau: Brenda's um cousin Jake's roommate has a python (...) for a pet.
9 Mic: o-o-h.
10 Lau: it just freaks me out a little bit.
11 Don: do they do studies on **people who have snakes for pets?**
12 Mom: I wonder.

In line 11, Donna might well have formulated her question with a noun compound like 'snake people'. But since the compound *snake person* in line 2 is already committed to the interpretation of 'liking/not being freaked out by snakes', this would not be a useful option. Somewhat more restrictive would be a formulation of this concept as *snake owners*. But this compound NP would have missed two features that the LHRC provides: first, *snake owners* could denote people who own snakes for research or to supply pet shops, whereas the clausality of the LHRC allows for both verbs like *keep* and prepositional-phrase adjuncts like *for pets*. We note that the function of orienting to the categoryhood of LHRCs is co-present with the function of providing a clausal platform for adjuncts, so the clausality is not a function that competes with the categoryhood orientation.

We can see the clausality of an LHRC working in a speaker's favor in various of our examples. If we return to fragment 12), where John says *they have (just) specific things to do each day*, for instance, the clausality of this LHRC provides John with the opportunity to specify the 'daily-ness' of the activities with an adverbial *each day*. Similarly, in extract 8), the adjunct *echt* 'really' in *iemand die echt wasmachines stal* 'someone who really stole washing machines' is readily accommodated by the clausal nature of the formulation.

7.2 Implications and further questions about the 'orientation to categories' view

In our account, LHRCs contribute an orientation to the categoryhood of a state of affairs to the interaction. What we haven't addressed yet is why LHRCs carry out this function in the first place. One possible answer derives from the fact that LHRCs are nominal expressions which, unlike non-complex nominals, **conventionally** present an event or state of affairs as a category for interactional purposes. Whereas non-complex nominals present classes of things, their status as a category is typically not oriented to. We further suggest that the formulation of a relative clause points to the fact that the category is constructed 'on the fly', and its novelty may more strongly draw attention to its status as a category. Finally, the use of a light noun as the head of an RC can be read as an

indication that the speaker primarily wants to formulate an RC, and defaults to a light noun in order to make a well-formed production.

Regardless of precisely what motivates the orientation to categoryhood, our data show that the issue of categoryhood is of importance to speakers. The recruitment of the different facets of categoryhood for various interactional goals sheds light on a commonsense conception of what it is to be a category. What our data suggest, moreover, is that the commonsense conception of categoryhood is strongly enmeshed in interaction; it is a way of creating an interactionally-motivated shared conception of a state of affairs.

This characterization of how speakers consider categoryhood suggests 'being a category' is something that is first and foremost of relevance for interaction. Here, our analysis aligns with Edwards' (1991) that categories exist for talking, as well as Silverstein's (2004) analysis of cultural concepts as primarily existing in an interactional practice, but we crucially draw attention to the observation that the 'metalanguage' of our commonsense models is itself a commonsense model that exists in and for interaction. In other words, the category of CATEGORY is 'for talking' too. This conception furthermore generalizes the insights of Membership Category Analysis: it is not just social categories such as *immigrant*, *child*, and *guy* that should be seen as sequentially regulated interactional contributions, but categories more generally. Such a view suggests that the categories associated with our words, while constrained by language-external reality, may emerge to a large extent in and through interaction, in other words, that interactional requirements causally ground categories (Enfield 2014).

7.3 Commonsense conceptions of categoryhood and grammar

If categoryhood is an active concern of speakers, it is likely that there are other lexico-grammatical patterns that conventionally allow speakers to recruit their commonsense knowledge of categoryhood as well. In the nominal domain, other constructions exist (sometimes called 'occasionalisms' (Crystal 1995)) for creating categories 'for the nonce' (Clark 1983). For example, Downing (1977) argues that Noun-Noun compounds are prominent members of this family, productively created "as ad-hoc names for entities or categories deemed name-worthy" at particular interactional moments (p. 841). Ariel and Mauri (2018) find that the most common function of *or* constructions is actually to introduce higher-level categories, quite often ad hoc ones. Interestingly, whereas LHRCs illustrate speakers adopting a top-down approach, by explicitly defining the *conceptual essence* of the relevant category and deriving its extensions from it, *or*-construction categories reveal speakers applying a bottom-up procedure. These categories are ad hoc abstractions over the explicit *or* alternatives, each construed as a category member and together pointing to the higher-level category.

Creative agentive derivation in English and other languages might also be cited. With the perspective presented in this paper, it would be of interest to revisit the interactional motivations for choosing to formulate a state of affairs with a Noun-Noun compound, an *or* construction, or an agentive derivation, in particular when they are coined for the nonce. A more distant cousin of these patterns can be found in the verbal domain, where

light verb constructions with proper nouns as the direct object (*pull a Rumsfeld, do a Reagan, have a Chernobyl*) are used to take a ‘similative’ meaning (‘behaving/being like X’) and make it into a category of events, that is, present it as a *kind* of event instead of as an event that is *similar to* another event.

The cases discussed here open the intriguing possibility that some parts of our grammar may be dedicated to orienting to the categoryhood of certain states of affairs that we are talking about. In doing so, these grammatical structures conventionally recruit our socially-shared commonsense models, so that their formulations as relative clauses, noun compounds, etc., eventually come to carry culturally grounded meaning (as opposed to meaning grounded in individual cognition).

7.4 Cross-language comparisons

Our data, in addition to the considerations presented in this discussion, suggest that it would be of great interest to consider ways of orienting to categoryhood in languages that are more distant from each other than the two considered here. There are two reasons why we might expect there to be noticeable cross-linguistic differences in the way relative-clause-like constructions are put to use in interaction. First, relative-clause-like constructions may be conventionally associated with other functions than orienting to the categoryhood of a state of affairs. They may, indeed, be used more for the referential function that has been thought to be dominant for the English relative clauses, or they may be used more for information presented as secondary (like non-restrictive relative clauses). Of particular interest here are languages with grammatical patterns that deviate substantially from English and Dutch, such as the ‘Noun-Modifying Constructions’ discussed for Japanese by Matsumoto (1997), Matsumoto et al. (2017), and Takara (2012), and for Mandarin by Tao (2002) and Huang (2013: chap. 7). Secondly, it may be that relative-clause-like constructions are conventionally associated with an orientation to categoryhood, but the commonsense conception of categoryhood differs from the conception we presented for English and Dutch.

We hope to have shown, then, that English and Dutch speakers’ use of LHRCs sheds light on the ways in which recurrent linguistic patterns can invoke categories that matter at specific moments to participants engaged in everyday interaction.

APPENDIX A: Transcription conventions

[]	overlapping talk
xx	uncertain hearing
()	in translations from Dutch, indicates material not present in the Dutch extract
<u>w</u>	stressed sound
w:	length
W	greater amplitude
w-	cut-off
...	pause

@	laughter
<Q>	direct quote
> <	faster talk
=	latched to previous turn
ˈhh	inbreath

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