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Unattached NPs in English Conversation*

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1. Introduction

A number of recent studies have confirmed that an understanding of syntax depends in large part on an understanding of its role in the interactional settings in which language is used.¹ In line with these studies, we have been working towards a way of integrating syntax and interaction. In a recent paper (Ono and Thompson to appear), we have proposed a model of syntax based on conversation, the most ordinary and mundane form of human language. We suggest there that, while the syntax of a language may be constantly being shaped by cognitive and interactional factors, we still need to recognize a relatively stable aspect of grammar. Following Langacker 1987, 1991, we show that the syntax one finds in conversational data can be accounted for by template-like syntactic schemas, or prototypes. We also demonstrate with a number of striking examples from English conversations that the realization of these relatively stable schemas interacts second-by-second with cognitive and interactional factors.

Since our conclusions could have been reached only by examining actual conversational data, we have also demonstrated the value of studying conversation if our goal is to understand and eventually be able to provide representations of grammatical mechanisms and the way in which they are called into action in human interaction. Our research thus shows that an understanding of how syntax works might depend at least partially on an account of how social interaction works.

The present paper represents one further step toward the goal of integrating syntax and interaction. By discussing the syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, as well as prosodic characteristics of a type of grammatical construction which we have found in our conversational database, we aim to arrive at a deeper understanding of the nature of syntax, and the way syntactic resources are called into play in conversational interaction. In particular, we seek to understand a small piece of English syntax, namely noun phrases which are not in any grammatical relation with any predicate, what we are calling 'unattached NPs'.

2. Transcription and database

Before we look at some examples, we should comment on our transcription system and our database. The transcription system we are using is that of Du Bois et al. 1993 with minor modifications. This system takes an intonation unit (roughly a single intonation contour, but see Chafe 1987, 1992, 1993, 1994, Du Bois 1991, Du Bois et al. 1993, and Du Bois and Schuetze-Coburn 1993 for discussion) as a basic unit of spoken language, so each line represents one intonation unit. Each line ends with a punctuation mark indicating

the shape of the intonation contour: a comma indicates a continuing contour, a period indicates a final contour, and a question mark indicates an appeal contour. Other transcription conventions seen in the examples are glossed in the chart in the appendix.

Our database consists of eight American English conversational extracts, each between 5 and 15 minutes long. All the conversations were among people who knew each other well and involved between two and five participants, and all have been transcribed by trained transcribers in conjunction with the Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English. We have found 101 unattached NPs in this database. Each of our unattached NPs is at least one intonation unit long; some take two intonation units.

3. Examples of unattached NPs²

Unattached NPs in our conversational English database fall into roughly two major types, according to the conversational role they are playing. There is a minority which function in the negotiation of referents which will be tracked in the ensuing discourse. We call these 'referential'.

The majority of unattached NPs in these English data, however, perform social actions as the following:

(1) Social actions performed by the majority of unattached NPs:

characterizing	assessing
ascribing	identifying
labeling	classifying
summarizing	encapsulating
recapitulating	specifying

a situation or a referent.

Our cover term for these various interactional functions will be 'predicating'; in other words, what the unattached NPs in this second group do is something like what stative predicates do, not what NPs typically do in English. For example, in (2),

(2) assessing with predicate (Goodwin and Goodwin 1987, 1992):

N: Jeff made an asparagus pie
 --> it was s:::so goo:d

we can see N using a predicate adjective construction to assess the asparagus pie. Predicate nominals are another kind of stative predicate which has the same sorts of 'predicating' functions. Our claim is, then, that the majority of our unattached NPs function in a similar way to perform the interactional predicating functions

listed in (1).

In this paper we will focus on examples of this second type and present arguments to convince you that they are indeed doing this predicating kind of work.

Before proceeding to our claim, let's look at some examples of each of these two types of unattached NPs. First, consider (3):

(3) Afrika 5

--> 1 A: and this la=dy,
2 ... (H) nobody knows yet why.
3 and most of us think,
4 she probably fainted.
5 ... but she fell,

The NP at the arrow, *this lady*, cannot itself be associated with any predicate in the context, although of course its referent is the same as the referents of *she* in lines 4 and 5. This is the type of unattached NP which in syntactic discussions has been referred to under headings such as 'topicalization' or 'left-dislocation', but which has more recently come to be explained in terms of its function of negotiating the identification of a referent (see, e.g, Ashby 1988, Geluykens 1987, 1988, 1992, Keenan and Schieffelin 1976a, b, Kim 1992, Ochs 1983, Ochs and Schieffelin 1983, Tao 1992, 1993).

Here are further examples of this referential type:

(4) Cuz 18

--> 1 A: this party I went to Friday night,
2 where Jane was jamming on that harmonica?
3 that was absolute- --
4 well first of all,
5 it's %paddlers.

(5) Farm 3

A: ...() (TSK) then one afternoon,
...() this van pulls in there,
B: .. [yeah,
a white van?]
A: [Jeannie wasn't home].
.. yeah.
--> ...() and this guy,
.. he went,
.. and he <X knew X> .. Smokey,
.. an=d you know he knew what was going on,
.. and he worked around there in the yard,
and I knew that%,
... he had spent some time around there.

(6) Cuz 3 (talking about a car radio which had been stolen)

--> A: Franklin's radio=
 with --
 i- it was bro=ken,
 we were going to s-
 take it out and send it back to the factory,
 to get a new factory,
 .. (H) radio,
 we never got a chance,

In each of these instances, the unattached NP is being used as part of the process of establishing or tracking a discourse referent.

Now consider an example of the other type, the type we are calling 'predicating':

(7) Car 12

1 D: right down the street,
 2 .. they have the Dodge dealer.
 3 G: ... oh they have the% .. d --
 4 ... Jack Ellis?
 5 ...() no.
 6 D: ...() Pete Ellis.
 7 G: ... Pete Ellis.
 8 D: ... yeah.
 9 ...() yeah,
 10 it's right down the street,
 11 ...() see so um --
 --> 12 ...() nothing to be ashamed of,
 13 I'm- I'm a professional salesman.
 14 G: ... % yeah.

D and G are talking about D's new profession as a car salesman. Lines 1 - 10 are a digression about where Dodges are sold in the neighborhood, but in lines 11 and 12, after two long pauses, D returns to the topic of his profession; in line 12 he characterizes the situation with *nothing to be ashamed of*.

Here are some further examples of predicating unattached NPs.

(8) Dinner 1

A: ...() I feel really wei=rd being in California,
 .. I can tell you that.
 S: ... really?
 A: ... you're a native,
 ...() but,
 .. when you come from Washington,
 ...() and Seattle,
 B: ... [by way of Georgia],

A: [XXXX] --
--> .. all these problems,
... yeah,
I was in Seattle though for a lo=ng time.

Here A characterizes the situation resulting in his moving to California with *all these problems*.

(9) Cuz 7

A: (H) .. they all live down like in Del Mar?
--> ...() (SWALLOW) (TSK) w- super ritzy area.

In (9), A characterizes the place where 'they' live with the unattached NP *super ritzy area*.

(10) Car 1

G: ...() so,
--> .. cold start regulator,
.. is [that it]?
D: [oh,
.. man],
I just had one put in.
--> .. two hundred bucks.
.. [for that].
G: [o=h],
fuck.

In (10), at the first arrow, G, overhearing D's telephone call, proposes a candidate characterization of what D's car problem is. At the second arrow, D's *two hundred bucks* characterizes the impact on him of his own new cold start regulator.

(11) Cuz 11

A: @@@ @so @she wants to [go out on the balcony],
L: [(H)]
A: I grab her again,
[and I go],
L: [(Hx)]
--> A: (H) no kids on the balcony.

In (11), A specifies the situation which A wants to impose on the child with the unattached NP at the arrow.³

(12) Car 8 (talking about the type of customers D has in his car sales business)

- D: .. basically they're .. Caucasians.
 G: .. yeah,
 it% doesn't seem like uh --
 .. uh,
 ... you know,
 .. T.J.'s,
 .. @N buy% ... Chryslers.
 D: no.
 .. [no.
 we're talking --
 .. people that are making] th --
 G: [@@@@@@@@ (H) (H)]
 D: maybe over thirty thousand a year.
 G: .. [yeah],
 D: [in the] thirty,
 .. thirty-five thousand --
 --> G: (0) yups,
 .. and <% u=h %>,
 [uh%],
 D: [exactly].

At the arrow, G's unattached NP *yups* (= yuppies) is a collaborative restatement of the type of customers D has said he has, and is ratified as such by D's *exactly*.

In each of these instances, the unattached NP serves in one of the ways listed in (1), to characterize, label, identify, etc. a referent or situation, and not to establish or track a referent.

4. Claim

Of these two types of unattached NPs, as mentioned above, the first one has been discussed at some length in the literature, either in terms of 'topic' or 'left-dislocation' constructions, or in terms of referent-introduction. What is striking to us is that it is the second type which predominates in the data; it is thus the second type upon which we wish to focus in this paper.

This second type of unattached NP, as illustrated in (7), functions consistently in the ways we listed above in (1), to characterize, ascribe, assess, identify, label, or classify a situation or referent. The claim, then, which we will argue for in this paper is that given in (13):

- (13) Claim: In conversational English, there is a substantial number of unattached NPs. Of these, a minority (20%) function to negotiate discourse referents. But the majority (fully 80%) function not in discourse referential roles but assume a function similar to predicates. We will distinguish these by referring to the first type as 'referential' and the second type as 'predicating'.

There are three interesting points about this predicating function for

unattached NPs. First, compared to the referential type, the predicating type has, as far as we know, essentially not been noticed before. An important exception is Helasvuo to appear, which identifies a similar function for unattached NPs in Finnish conversation.⁴

Second, this predicating function is not the function that NPs typically have in discourse. It has been argued that the primary function of NPs as a grammatical resource is a 'referential' one, to track referents in the discourse (Hopper and Thompson 1984). Indeed, an examination of our English conversational data shows that most of the NPs that function as *arguments* do in fact serve referential roles, introducing and tracking referents, as expected. But when used BY THEMSELVES, the majority of unattached NPs, about 80% in our database, appear to be playing a predicating role.

We are claiming, in other words, that these two types of unattached NPs function differently in conversational interaction. While the referential unattached NPs are used by speakers in the service of establishing referents, the predicating NPs are typically used to summarize, assess, characterize, label, encapsulate, or identify a situation or referent. Thus, as shown in (3) - (6), each of the referential unattached NPs, *this lady*, *this party I went to Friday night*, *this guy*, and *Franklin's radio*, is part of the negotiation of the referent to be discussed in the ensuing conversation. But the predicating unattached NPs typically have a NON-referential function, doing the work of predicates, as listed in (1). Thus, in (9), *super ritzy area* characterizes the place where 'they' live. In (10), *cold start regulator* is a candidate characterization of D's car problem which was overheard in the preceding telephone conversation. The third point we wish to emphasize about these predicating unattached NPs is that they are NOT best analyzed as instances of ellipsis. We ourselves wondered whether they were somehow truncated predicate nominals, or even whether they could be thought of in terms of an ellipted 'light verb'. But two arguments convinced us that this wouldn't work.

First, the range and variety of the set of predicating unattached NPs, that is, those serving one of the predicating functions listed in (1) above, shows that no single or uniform fully specified predicate could account for all of them. In fact, if one tries to relate our predicating unattached NPs to some fully specified predicate, each one we have seen so far takes a different predicate, as illustrated in (14):

- (14) a. **it's** nothing to be ashamed of
OR
there's nothing to be ashamed of
OR
I have nothing to be ashamed of
b. **we have** people who are making thirty thousand a year
OR
they are people who are making thirty thousand a year
c. **it's the** cold start regulator

- d. **it cost** two hundred bucks
 OR
I paid two hundred bucks
- e. **there can be** no kids on the balcony
 OR
 no kids **allowed** on the balcony
- f. **they are** yups
 OR
it's (mostly) yups
 OR
you mean yups

etc.

Further, for many of them, as seen in (14), we can't tell which of several predicates we should postulate for a given unattached NP. This indeterminacy strongly suggests the inappropriateness of an analysis which claims that something has been 'deleted' or 'ellipted'.

Second, and just as important, we claim that there is a crucial interactional difference between using a fully specified clausal predicate and using a predicating unattached NP. In other words, speakers use predicating unattached NPs where specifying a full predication is inappropriate. A full demonstration of this point would take us beyond our page limit, but let's consider one example:

(15) Car 6

D: I'm not eating a lot of fattening foods or anything,
 .. and uh=,

--> G: .. no carnitas,
 @@@@@@ [ə]

D: [no I] have them every now and then,

In this example, at the arrow, G could have said something like *you're eating no carnitas*, but this clause sounds strange in this context. We would say something more like *you're not eating any carnitas*. Not only are the NP and clausal versions syntactically, semantically, and pragmatically different, but the negative unattached NP in fact does the job and allows G to avoid taking the floor with a concise short and to-the-point predicating NP.

Similarly, if we go back to example (11), we can see that no clausal version of the unattached NP *no kids on the balcony* would have the same meaning or pragmatic force as the unattached NP does; in this context it has the force of a strong prohibition. Or in (12), when G says *yups*, this is not the same as if he had said *they are yups*, since what G does say, *yups*, is a candidate characterization which he proposes to check his understanding, but a clause like *They are yups* is pragmatically more like an assertion.

Our claim, then, is that these predicating NPs have a life of their own in interaction; they are not 'fragments' and cannot be thought of as related in any

useful way to other kinds of grammatical construction types.

In sum, in terms of their role in the conversation, these two types of unattached NPs are quite different: the referential unattached NPs consistently play a role in establishing or tracking referents, while the predicating unattached NPs serve to label, assess, identify, encapsulate, or recapitulate a previous referent or situation.

5. Arguments

In what follows we will briefly present six arguments in favor of this claim.

Argument 1: Prosody. The functional difference we are proposing is reflected in a prosodic skewing. As you can see in Table 1, the referential unattached NPs universally have continuing intonation contours. In (6), for example, *Franklin's radio* has a continuing intonation contour, signalled by the comma. The predicating unattached NPs, on the other hand, often (70% of the time) have a final intonation contour, as you can see in (9), where the Predicating NP *super ritzy area* has a final intonation contour, as signalled by the period. These prosodic facts support our claim that unattached NPs are used in two strikingly different ways in English conversation.⁵

TABLE 1: REFERENTIAL AND PREDICATING UNATTACHED NPs WITH FINAL AND CONTINUING INTONATION CONTOURS

	<u>final</u>	<u>continuing</u>
Ref.	0 (0%)	20 (100%)
Pred.	56 (70%)	24 (30%)

Argument 2: Form. There is also a striking difference between the form of the referential and the predicating NPs. As shown in Table 2, the referential NPs are 100% fully specified NPs, either proper nouns or NPs with such determiners or genitive modifiers. For example, if we look at (3) - (6) again, we see that (3) - (5) contain the demonstrative *this* and (6) has a genitive modifier *Franklin's radio*. The predicating NPs, on the other hand, 65% of the time are 'bare', that is, contain no determiners, or contain quantifiers which neutralize the possibility of other NP determiners, just like predicate nominals. So, for example, in (10), we find *cold start regulator* in 'bare' form, without any determiners.

TABLE 2: REFERENTIAL AND PREDICATING UNATTACHED NPs WHICH ARE FULLY SPECIFIED VS. BARE

	<u>fully specified</u>	<u>bare</u>
Ref.	20 (100%)	0 (0%)
Pred.	28 (35%)	52 (65%)

This is consonant with the claim made in Hopper and Thompson 1984:710:

- (16) To the extent that a linguistic form is carrying out this prototypical function [to introduce participants and 'props' and deploy them in the discourse], it will be coded as N, and will manifest the full possible range of nominal trappings conventional in the language. Forms which fail in some way to refer to concrete, deployable entities will typically lack some or all of these trappings.

This morpho-syntactic difference further supports our claim that unattached NPs perform at least these two different functions in discourse.

Argument 3: Proper Nouns and Pronouns. Given the referential vs. predicating distinction we have been arguing for, we would expect that there would be no occurrences of the most highly referential NPs, namely proper nouns or pronouns, doing predicating work. And indeed, in our entire database, of the more than 80 predicating NPs, we found only a handful which have the form of a proper noun or pronoun. Because the expected prediction does not hold 100% of the time in our data, however, it is worth examining one such case to see how it can be that such NPs are performing a predicating function. Consider (17):

- (17) Cuz 27 (talking about V's work situation)

L: who does he work with [now].
 A: [(H)]
 ... [Kenny].
 L: [Rosen]tha[1].
 A: [Ke-]
 .. no.
 .. uh well,
 [yeah.
 L: [(H=)]
 A: Rosenthal's down the] hall,
 (H) and <X then it's X> --
 Kenny's his assistant,
 L: (SWALLOW)
 A: and then .. they don't have the third editor.
 ...() (TSK) but it's so ni=ce.
 --> L: .. him and Ken[ny].
 A: [(H)=[=)]
 L: [essentially].

The compound NP *him and Kenny* at the arrow is not being mentioned here to track these referents, or to refer to them as people, but to characterize the situation with the two of them working together.

Argument 4: Process of Interpretation. We have claimed that the referential unattached NPs are used for referential purposes; as can be seen from the examples in (3) - (6), these referential unattached NPs are interpreted in terms of what FOLLOWS them, which is typically a clause or predicate with which they can be associated and in terms of which they can be interpreted. These referential NPs could thus be said to be 'forward-looking'. The predicating unattached NPs, on the other hand, are interpreted in terms of what PRECEDES them; that is, they offer a characterization, ascription, classification, or assessment of situation or referent inferable from preceding talk. The predicating NPs could be said to be 'backward-looking', as summarized in (18):

- (18) - Referential: 'forward-looking'
- Predicating: 'backward-looking'

Argument 5: Sequential position with respect to turns. These facts regarding the forward-looking vs. backward-looking nature of these two types of unattached NPs are also reflected in their position with respect to turns (as suggested in Ford and Thompson to appear). As shown in (19), the referential unattached NPs never come at the end of a turn, except when the turn is broken off for some interactional reason. This is clearly related to their function in negotiating referents to be tracked in the ensuing conversation. The predicating NPs, on the other hand, often come at the ends of turns, or are followed by a discourse marker which ends a turn, as the NP *cold start regulator* in (10) shows.

- (19) - Referential: never occur at turn end
- Predicating: tend to occur at turn end

Further support for this distinction shown in (19) can be seen in (20), the fact that the predicating NPs are found in a type of sequence that the referential NPs are never found in. Namely, predicating NPs, with their encapsulating, summarizing functions, can be used as a type of lexical 'backchannel' device, but we found no referential NPs used this way.

- (20) - Referential: never used as 'backchannel'
- Predicating: can be used as 'backchannel'

Examples can be seen in (21), (22).

- (21) Lunch 5 (talking about C's kidney infection)

M: ...() (H) and she's not ...() (H) going to the bathroom,
as often as she should,
even though she's drinking gallons of water,

R: ...() she's going to get fat.
 .. if she does that.
 --> L: @N water [balloon].
 M: [no],
 she's going to get bloated.

L's NP at the arrow, *water balloon*, characterizes what C will be like if she keeps drinking too much water. This NP is used like a backchannel token; we might suggest that, since she isn't making a floor-taking move, a predicating unattached NP is even more appropriate than a full clause: partly because of its phonologically small size, it can do characterizing work without taking a full turn.

(22) Africa 3

A: .. they got out,
 of the Land Rover,
 which wasn't [a very] .. (H) smart thing to do.
 --> B: [first mistake].

In (22), B's NP at the arrow, *first mistake*, is again like a backchannel token, characterizing and assessing the getting out of the Land Rover. It is 'sneaked in' in overlap with A's talk SO AS not to take the floor. Again, the non-floor-taking nature of this conversational contribution makes it especially appropriate to use just an NP rather than a full clause.

When G says *yups* in (12), a similar 'backchannel' function can be seen.

We suggest, then, that this turn-final tendency of unattached predicating NPs is motivated by the predicating work they do - the interactional moves listed in (1) are the sorts of moves that frequently serve to yield the floor to another speaker.

Argument 6: Independence from clause grammar. Our sixth argument has to do with the ways in which these two types of unattached NPs are 'outside' the grammar. Referential unattached NPs, as we just noted, typically depend on a following predication for their interpretation. They have often been described as 'outside the clause', but they are pragmatically bound up with clause grammar to some extent. Thus, to go back to (4), the referent of the unattached NP *this party I went to Friday night* is mentioned again in line 3 as *that*, which is an argument of the predication *was absolute--*. This predication is broken off before being finished, but enough has been said to make it clear that it was begun as a predication in terms of which the NP in line 1 would be interpreted.

A charming example from one of our conversations supports this argument and reveals the extent to which speakers may be consciously aware of the relationship between a referential unattached NP and a following predication:

(23) Lam 10 (begins discussion of a new topic)

M: ...() those two top ma=sks,
.. there.
H: ...() yep,
J: @@@
--> H: [we need a verb].
M: [I guess the] [ones below are women],
P: [@@@@@]
J: [@@@ (H)]
M: is that why they look so different,

In this example, M produces an unattached NP in the first line, without immediately providing a predication. After a long pause (signalled by '...()' in line 3), H says 'yep', acknowledging M's candidate referent, and then at the arrow, overtly comments on the fact that no predication has been provided. Overlapping with this comment, M then provides a predication which could be interpreted as the predication whose absence H had commented on.

In contrast, the predicating type of unattached NP seems to have nothing to do with clause GRAMMAR. Predicating NPs are neither grammatical predicates nor are they arguments of any grammatical predicates. For example, consider (10) again. Prior to this example, G has been listening to D talking on the phone about a problem with his car. When he hangs up, G says *cold start regulator, is that it?*, inferring from D's part of the telephone call that the problem has to do with the cold start regulator. His question asks D to confirm that the car problem can be characterized as one involving the cold start regulator. But this is very different from claiming that that NP is the predicate of some argument. So we are suggesting that these predicating unattached NPs are not predicates in a grammatical sense, but that they are functionally doing predicating work.

We hope the six arguments which we have presented above have demonstrated that there are two kinds of unattached NPs, each of which is characterized by its own discourse function: referential and predicating. Before closing this paper, we would like to discuss one more example which can be taken to further support our claim.

6. Predicating NPs which serve to establish referents

Our database contains a few predicating unattached NPs which also seem to play a role in establishing referents. Consider our favorite example:

(24) Farm 1 (talking about painting the house)

A: I thought you were going to spray it.
--> B: .. oh that gutless ... sprayer.
it --
...() the wind blows,
.. and heck it doesn't --

- .. it just [blows it] away.
 A: [o=h]?
 B: ... () that sprayer's gutless.

Here at the arrow, the fully specified NP *that gutless sprayer* epithetically characterizes the situation that explains why the house painting isn't being done by spraying, and can thus be considered a predicating unattached NP. But at the same time, it is referential, being introduced for possible referent tracking. In fact, this NP is referred to twice again in this extract, by the *it* in the very next intonation unit and by *that sprayer* at the end. We suggest that we might think of this as a predicating NP which is also being used in the service of establishing a referent. The existence of such 'bi-functional' unattached NPs, we argue, reinforces our claim that unattached NPs serve these two functions in English - the same two functions can sometimes be observed in the same NP at a given point in a conversational interaction.

7. Conclusions

In sum, in this paper, we have examined a particular syntactic phenomenon, namely unattached NPs, and we have argued that there are two primary interactional functions that they can be seen to have in conversation: a referential function and a predicating function. We have further argued that predicating NPs accomplish the interactional work of characterizing, assessing, ascribing, identifying, labeling, classifying, summarizing, encapsulating, recapitulating, or specifying but are neither grammatical predicates themselves nor are they related to grammatical predications.

In a broader perspective, we have tried to show in this paper that insight into the way syntax works can be gained by considering the way in which syntactic resources are brought into play in conversational interaction.

NOTES

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1. For a selection of relevant references, readers are referred to Ono and Thompson to appear.

2. For the purposes of this discussion, we are not including the following types of NPs, interesting though they may be:

- vocatives
- answers to questions where the argument-predicate relation is clear
- discourse markers such as *or something* which have the form of NPs
- NPs which clearly serve as repairs

3. Many people who have heard this paper delivered as a talk have objected to this example, saying that *no kids on the balcony* seems to be grammaticized as a kind of prohibitive quote, as if on a sign. We agree, but, since it is an unattached NP by our criteria, we see no reason to remove it from our database. On the contrary, we take its grammaticized use as a prohibition as supporting our claim that predicating NPs have a life of their own apart from any clause structure (see below).

4. In addition, there is one other mention of unattached NPs that we are aware of in the literature: this is in a short list in Curme 1931:2 of a single word conveying our meaning and constituting 'a complete sentence': *Glass. Handle with care*. We imagine a written, rather than a spoken, context for the unattached NP *glass* (e.g., on the outside of a box), but it is easily interpreted as an example of a predicating unattached NP, serving to IDENTIFY the contents of the box.

5. Some colleagues have suggested that this is *prima facie* evidence that the predicating unattached NPs are directly related to clauses, since these too would presumably have final intonation contours. But we would counter such a suggestion in two ways:

a) By no means do all clauses have final intonation contours; many have continuing contours.

b) Whatever unattached NPs and clauses may share prosodically we would seek to explain in terms of the shared interactional role of such instances of final intonation contours rather than in terms of unattached NPs being derived from clauses.

Our argument here is in line with the feelings of Curme (1931:2), speaking of the situation in which 'a single word in connection with the proper tone or the situation conveys our meaning and thus constitutes a complete sentence':

In all such cases, the expression of the thought is perfect. The sentences, though brief, are complete. In the setting in which they appear, not a word, not a syllable is lacking. A learned grammarian with mistaken enthusiasm

might desire to expand these brief utterances into full sentences, but in spite of his grammatical skill the language would be bad, for it would violate good usage. We do not here usually employ full sentences, and for a good reason. Fuller expression would be incomplete expression, for it would mar the thought, take something vital away from it.

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APPENDIX: SYMBOLS FOR DISCOURSE TRANSCRIPTION

from Du Bois et al. (1993)

UNITS.	
Intonation unit	<u>{carriage return}</u>
Truncated intonation unit	--
Word	<u>{space}</u>
Truncated word	-
SPEAKERS	
Speaker identity/turn start	:
Speech overlap	[]
TRANSITIONAL CONTINUITY	
Final	.
Continuing	,
Appeal	?
LENGTHENING	
	=
PAUSE	
Long	...
Medium	...()
Short	...
Latching	..
	(0)
VOCAL NOISES	
Vocal noises	()
Alveolar click	(TSK)
Inhalation	(H)
Exhalation	(Hx)
Glottal stop	%
Laughter	@
Nasal laughter	@N
QUALITY	
Creaky	<% %>
TRANSCRIBER'S PERSPECTIVE	
Uncertain hearing	<X X>
Indecipherable syllable	X