

## Nonspecific promises: Restitutive *again* and intensional transfer-of-possession verbs.

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**1. Introduction.** This paper describes a novel “Intensional Restitution Effect” (henceforth IRE), under which restitutive readings of *again* and *back* are incompatible with nonspecific objects of intensional verbs. New data, primarily involving ditransitive ‘transfer-of-possession’ (ToP) verbs, illustrates this unexpected pattern of infelicity. I show that the IRE follows naturally from the path-based, polysemous framework proposed by Zwarts (2019).

**2. Restitutive *again* and *back*.** *Again* is known to receive multiple interpretations, usually called “repetitive” and “restitutive”. These are paraphrased for (1) as in (1a) and (1b), respectively. A restitutive interpretation is also available for *back*.

- (1) Emma gave Frank the bottle of wine again.
  - a. Emma gave Frank the bottle of wine, and she’d given it to him before. (Repetitive)
  - b. Emma gave Frank the bottle of wine, and he’d had it before. (Restitutive)
- (2) Emma gave Frank the bottle of wine back.
  - a. Emma gave Frank the bottle of wine, and he’d had it before. (Restitutive)

**3. Data.** When the object of an intensional ToP verbs is nonspecific, modification by *again/back* lacks the expected restitutive reading. The context in (3) supports the intended restitutive interpretation of (4) and eliminates the repetitive, yet the restitutive interpretation is infelicitous.

- (3) Context: Emma forgot to buy wine for her dinner party. She explained the situation to her neighbor Frank, and although he’d never done this before, he happily gave her a bottle of wine on the condition that she replace it with another. Emma promised that she would.
- (4) In short, #Emma promised Frank a bottle of wine *again/back*.

This does not seem to be due to a failure of the context—the restitutive-type paraphrase in (5) remains felicitous. And simply removing *again/back* produces the felicitous description in (6). This shows that the infelicity of (4) stems from some interaction involving the adverb.

- (5) Emma promised Frank a bottle of wine, and he’d had a bottle of wine before.
- (6) In short, Emma promised Frank a bottle of wine.

In context (7), which disambiguates toward a specific interpretation of the indefinite object, (8) does support a restitutive interpretation. This shows that it is specifically the combination of restitutive *again/back* and a nonspecific indefinite object that gives rise to the infelicity of (4). I call this pattern of infelicity the “Intensional Restitution Effect”.

- (7) Context: Frank gave Emma several bottles of wine to paint in a still-life, but asked for one particular bottle back once she’d finished painting. Emma promised she would return it.
- (8) In short, Emma promised Frank a bottle of wine *again/back*.

The judgments described here are subtle, and they are complicated by at least two factors. First, some speakers appear to have a preference for *back* in this context, which may block the use of *again*. Second, when an indefinite is presented as old information, a nonspecific interpretation is strongly preferred. This can be obviated by assuming a speaker-ignorance reading for (8), as in: “Emma promised Frank a bottle of wine (but I don’t know which).”

Though all these examples contain the verb *promise*, the Intensional Restitution Effect appears to hold widely across all intensional ToP verbs, including *offer*, *owe*, *bequeath*, and others. The data discussed here is somewhat similar to extensional examples discussed by Iyer (2018), though it is not yet clear to what extent these can receive a similar treatment (see also Dobler, 2008; Csirmaz, 2015).

**4. Analysis.** The IRE can be straightforwardly explained under the path-based framework of Zwarts (2019). Zwarts describes, for Dutch *terug*, a group of related meanings broadly relating

to repetition or reversal. I apply this analysis to English *again* and *back*, treating both as polysemous. The reading displayed in (1b) and (2a) above corresponds to Zwarts’s “returnative” reading, given in (9), which describes a subset of the cases commonly referred to as “restitutive” in the broader literature. Its presupposition relies on the notion of a semantic path.

$$(9) \quad \llbracket \text{again}_{\text{Returnative}} \rrbracket = \llbracket \text{back}_{\text{Returnative}} \rrbracket = \lambda E \lambda e : \exists e' [e' < e \wedge E'(e') \wedge \text{REVERSE}(\text{LPATH}(e), \text{LPATH}(e'))]. [E(e)] \quad (\text{Zwarts, 2019})$$

A path, in the sense of Zwarts, is associated with an event  $e$ , and is a set of points that describes the movement/development of  $\text{THEME}(e)$  over the time course of  $e$ . An  $\text{LPATH}$  is one type, representing movement in physical space. An event can be associated with a path if and only if  $\text{THEME}(e)$  can be mapped to successive points on that path over the time course of  $e$ .

The “returnative” presupposition in (9) requires that, for an event  $e$ , there exists a prior event  $e'$  such that the paths associated with  $e$  and  $e'$  are the reverse of one another. ( $\text{REVERSE}$  does not require significant overlap—at a minimum, the endpoints of  $\text{PATH}(e)$  must overlap with  $\text{PATH}(e')$ .) This presupposition correctly captures the interpretation of *again/back* in examples like (1b) and (2a), both of which describe an event  $e$  in which  $\text{THEME}(e)$ , the bottle, travels a path from Emma to Frank, and presuppose that the bottle previously traveled from Frank to Emma.

How does this denotation interact with *promise*? I assume, following Kratzer (2013), that intensional ToP verbs quantify over possible worlds, with the modal domain comprising all possible worlds consistent with the norms associated with the type of event described. (E.g., for a promise: the promise is honored, is not refused, etc.) In effect, a promise causes the promisee, in all possible worlds where it is fulfilled, to have some individual with the promised property.

$$(10) \quad \llbracket \text{promise} \rrbracket = \lambda x \lambda P \lambda z \lambda e. \text{promise}(e) \wedge \text{agent}(z)(e) \wedge \forall w (w \in f_{\text{norm}}(e) \rightarrow \exists y (P(y)(w) \wedge \exists s (\text{cause}(e)(s)(w) \wedge \text{have}(x)(y)(s)(w))))$$

One could take the promise’s theme to be the entity that the promisee receives in all worlds where the promise is fulfilled. When the object is specific, as in (8), I assume that it receives an  $\langle et, t \rangle$  interpretation: it undergoes quantifier raising, leaving a trace  $t_1$  that can be type-shifted into the property  $\lambda y. y = \llbracket t_1 \rrbracket^g$  (i.e., a property of being a particular individual). The presupposition of “returnative” *again/back* can then be satisfied: in all possible worlds that fulfill the promise, the same individual is received, and that individual is identified by  $\text{THEME}(e)$  and travels  $\text{PATH}(e)$ .

Importantly, this predicts the presupposition not to be satisfied when the object is nonspecific. In that case, different individuals fulfill the promise across different possible worlds, so  $\text{THEME}(e)$  cannot identify a unique individual. Without a unique theme, the event cannot be associated with a semantic path, and the presupposition of “returnative” *again/back* fails. Under this account, then, the IRE can be reduced to a case of presupposition failure.

**5. Additional data.** Broadening the data, we can see in (12) that the IRE is not limited to ToP verbs. (*Again* is omitted from (12) to avoid confusion with the repetitive reading.) These cases can be captured by the same analysis developed above.

(11) Context: Ann’s laptop was destroyed. Now she wants/needs to have a laptop again.

(12) #Ann wants/needs a laptop back.

**6. Discussion.** In this paper, I adopt Zwarts’s (2019) framework primarily because it offers a built-in explanation for the IRE: the path-based presuppositions of these lexical items inherently rely on the specificity of the object. It may be possible to offer convincing explanations for the IRE under other existing frameworks, but these face certain challenges. For example, structural analyses of the *again* ambiguity (e.g. von Stechow, 1996; Beck and Johnson, 2004), can derive restitutive interpretations by applying *again* to an embedded  $\text{HAVE}$  predicate, as in (13). It is not obvious in this analysis why *again* is sensitive to whether the object of  $\text{HAVE}$  is specific, nor is it obvious how to restrict this sensitivity only to the lower of the two available scope positions.

(13) Emma promised [[Frank  $\text{HAVE}$  a bottle of wine] again]. (Restitutive)

## References.

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