An Examination of the Controversy over English Nominal Tautologies

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1. Introduction

Nominal tautologies such as Business is business and War is war are formally simple. At first sight, they appear to be redundant and uninformative, yet people can understand what is communicated by apparently nonsense tautological statements, depending on the context. It appears highly likely that this expressional form exists in every language. What is interesting, however, is that almost all previous tautology studies have been based on English data. A number of articles have been published on English nominal tautology. There is little consensus on its interpretation process, and nobody has succeeded in characterizing it properly. Is it possible to include cases of English nominal tautology in a unified viewpoint analysis?

As a starting point for clarifying the overall picture of the interpretation process of English nominal tautology, I critically examine previous work on English nominal tautology, and suggest that the function of the English nominal tautology A is $A_1$ is to express an objection to an utterance or a thought that is attributed to someone other than the speaker at the utterance point.

2. Past Studies on English Nominal Tautologies

There are five approaches to the linguistic phenomenon of tautology: radical pragmatic approaches, radical semantic approaches, non-radical approaches, cognitive linguistic approaches and relevance theoretic approaches. This section grasps the essentials of each approach, attempts to show counterexamples to the previous studies, and concludes that they cannot be accepted. First, I focus on radical pragmatic approaches.

2.1 Radical Pragmatic Approach

A pragmatic approach to analyzing tautological utterances is often called a radical pragmatic approach as opposed to Wierzbicka’s radical semantic approach, which will be dealt with in 2.2. Most pragmatic analyses are more or less accounted for in terms of Grice’s framework of conversational maxims. This section discusses Levinson (1983) and Ward and Hirschberg (1991).

2.1.1 Levinson (1983)

Following Grice’s analysis of infringing the maxim of Quantity, Levinson (1983: 111) argues that "if the assumption that the speaker is actually co-operating is to be preserved, some

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informative inference must be made", and that the implicature of a tautological utterance depends on the context in which it is uttered. Consider (1):

(1) a. War is war. \[\forall x (W(x) \rightarrow W(x))\]
    b. Either John will come or he won’t. \[P \lor ~P\]
    c. If he does it, he does it. \[P \rightarrow P\] (Levinson 1983: 111)

These examples share the same truth condition since their logical forms \((\forall x (W(x) \rightarrow W(x)), P \lor ~P\) and \(P \rightarrow P\), respectively) are always true, but they would convey something like (2a)-(2c), respectively, based on pragmatic inference.

(2) a. "Terrible things always happen in war, that’s its nature and it’s no good lamenting that particular disaster.”
    b. "Calm down, there’s no point in worrying about whether he’s going to come because there’s nothing we can do about it.”
    c. "It’s no concern of ours.” (ibid.)

This analysis appears to describe how tautological utterances are interpreted, but as Levinson himself admits, it is unclear where such implicatures come from. He cannot generalize how to derive these aforementioned implicatures from the context. Besides, it seems to me that he assumes that (1a)-(1c) have only a certain implicature as in (2a)-(2c), respectively. In fact, however, we would obtain a different implicature from these examples as long as the contexts are properly established. Consider (3) and (4):

(3) [The president of the arms-manufacturing company is pleased when he hears the news that a war will start.]
   Employee: But I’m afraid that this war will not last long.
   President: \textit{War is war.} (Nishikawa 2003: 48)

(4) Cheri Brush : He’s taking a lot of ribbing from the guys in the neighborhood. I will tell you they’re calling him Larry Poppins.
   Dan Harris : And do you … you don’t care when you hear that?
   Larry Brush : \textit{A job is a job.} I don’t care about it, you know. You know, ‘cuz nothing … female/male, it doesn’t matter. It’s work. (ABC World News, 4 May 2009)

In (3), the company president, who is planning to increase arms sales, does not communicate that "terrible things always happen in war, that’s its nature and it’s no good lamenting that particular disaster”, as shown in (2a). Rather he communicates that war makes profits and is
a moneymaking event. The president’s utterance *War is war* indicates a profitable war, not a terrible war. In (4), new gender rules become an issue on a news program. Larry Brush works as a nurse. His neighbors tease him since a male nurse falls outside traditional gender rules, i.e. nurses are female. However, he does not care about the traditional idea. In this situation, by uttering *A job is a job*, he communicates that the traditional view of nurses is of no concern to him. This shows that although the utterance is formally different from *If he does it, he does it* in (1c), it communicates (nearly) the same meaning as that found in (2c) “it’s no concern of ours”. Levinson’s claim can neither predict that the *War is war* examples in (1a) and (3) convey a different meaning depending on context, nor explain that different tautologies such as (1c) and (4) share (almost) the same implicature. These observations show that Levinson’s claim is difficult to support. Next, let us overview Ward and Hirschberg (1991).

2.1.2 Ward and Hirschberg (1991)

Ward and Hirschberg (1991) argue that the tautological utterance ‘a is a’ flouts the maxim of Quantity, and it is used to convey the irrelevance of an alternative utterance ‘a is b’, where b represents either some property of a or some distinct equivalence to a, or ‘(some) a is b’, where b represents the properties or equivalences of some subset of a. Consider (5) and (6):

(5) “A State Department official said the administration was standing behind the statement made by Secretary of State George P. Shultz in a speech in New York last week: *Terrorism is terrorism.* It deserves no sanctuary, and it must be stopped.’ Messages went out to several U.S. embassies Monday night, saying the United States hoped governments would not yield to the hijackers.” (Ward and Hirschberg 1991: 514)

(6) "Stolichnaya vodka has been a slow mover, though, said restaurant manager Bill Leung. But not because of politics. ‘Hardly anybody orders it. In a small town, people don’t know the difference between vodkas. *Vodka is vodka,*’ he said.” (ibid.)

In their analysis, *Terrorism is terrorism* in (5) is used to convey the idea that the alternative utterance *Terrorism is sometimes justifiable* is not relevant. In (6), *Vodka is vodka* is used to convey the idea that the alternative utterance *(Some) vodka is Russian* is not relevant.

To be sure, this analysis is more systematic than Levinson’s, but it does not clearly describe how the alternative utterance ‘a is b’ or ‘(some) a is b’ is derived from the context in which a speaker produces the tautological utterance ‘a is a’. In their account, b identifies either some property of a or some distinct equivalence to a for ‘a is b’, and properties or equivalences of some subset of a for ‘(some) a is b’. This definition evokes b limitlessly and thus is inaccurate. Next, I will consider a radical semantic approach.
2.2 Radical Semantic Approach

Wierzbicka (1987, 2003), who heavily criticizes radical pragmatic analyses based on Grice’s universal principles, insists that the interpretation of tautological utterances depends on their forms. English nominal tautological patterns conforming to \((\text{ART}) N_i \text{ be } (\text{ART}) N_i\) are subcategorized based on what type of noun is used in the pattern. Their specific meanings are defined in “a technical, language-independent, semantic metalanguage derived from natural language” (Wierzbicka 1987: 103), as follows:

\[(7)\]

a. \(N_{\text{abstr}} \text{ is } N_{\text{abstr}}\) : “a sober attitude toward complex human activities”
   
   \(\text{e.g. War is war, Business is business.}\)

b. \(N_{\text{hum. pl}} \text{ are } N_{\text{hum. pl}}\) : “tolerance for human nature”
   
   \(\text{e.g. Boys are boys, Women are women.}\)

c. \((\text{ART}) N \text{ is } (\text{ART}) N\) : “obligation”
   
   \(\text{e.g. A rule is a rule, A father is a father.}\)  (Wierzbicka 1987: 104-110)

Here, let us consider only the pattern \(N_{\text{abstr}} \text{ is } N_{\text{abstr}}\) for reasons of space. In Wierzbicka’s judgment, \(\text{War is war and Business is business}\) are acceptable but \(\text{Wind is wind and Sneeze is sneezing}\) are not. On the basis of this observation, she concludes that this pattern is limited to complex human activities and it expresses a sober attitude toward the activities and \(N_{\text{abstr}}\) identifies a noun to convey negative aspects of such activities. The interpretation is generalized as follows:

\[(8)\]

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?]  (ibid.: 105)

This approach can explain the difference in meaning between tautologies that have different subcategorized forms. However, it is contrary to the facts and has a number of problems. First, the above generalized interpretation is not strict. Terms such as \(X\), \(\text{everyone}\) and \(I\) in (8) are highly ambiguous. For instance, the word \(X\) appears to be a variable. The interpreter needs to determine a value for \(X\) depending on the context. In spite of this, Wierzbicka does not provide any clear hints or clues as regards searching for the value.

Second, although this may appear to contradict the above point, her generalization is too rigid to hold up in every case. Compare (9a) with (9b):
(9) a. ‘...Now we have robots to help us? stronger, more useful, more capable than we are. Human beings are no longer alone. Have you ever thought of it that way?’

‘I’m afraid I haven’t.’

‘To you, a robot is a robot. Made by humans and, if necessary, destroyed by humans. But you haven’t worked with them, so you don’t know them. They’re cleaner, better creatures than we are. In the beginning, of course, robots couldn’t talk. ……’

(Isaac Asimov, I Robot - Short Stories)

b. ‘Speedy!’ shouted Powell into his radio. ‘Come here!’

Speedy looked up and saw them. He stopped suddenly and remained standing for a moment. Then he turned and ran away, kicking up dust behind him. Over their radios, Donovan and Powell heard him singing a song.

Donovan said weakly, ‘Greg, he’s crazy.’

‘He’s not crazy,’ Powell said. ‘A robot’s only a robot. There’s something wrong with him that’s confusing his brain patterns. Once we find out what it is, then we can fix it.’

(ibid.)

In her analysis, (9a) and (9b) fall into the pattern (ART) N is (ART) N in (7c). Both these utterances are expected to mean ‘obligation’. Contrary to the expectation, however, they are interpreted differently depending on the context. In (9a), where a female robot psychologist Dr. Calvin and a male newspaper writer are talking about robots, she thinks that robots are friendly towards human beings and are there to help them, while he disagrees. The italicized passage would be understood as communicating that (to the man,) robots should be controlled by human beings and they are nothing more than machines. This interpretation is not true of ‘obligation’. In (9b), two mechanics are looking for the lost robot Speedy and finally discover that Speedy is out of order. One of them describes the faulty robot as ‘crazy’ by analogy with a certain human condition. The italicized passage would be understood as communicating that the robot is not crazy in the way that a human being may be crazy, but is out of order in the same way as other machines. The interpretation is not true of ‘obligation’. These observations show that Wierzbicka’s generalization cannot properly predict the meaning of tautologies.

Third, as some researchers have already pointed out, Wierzbicka seems to judge the acceptability of tautologies on the basis of whether or not it holds true for her generalization. She presents Wind is wind as one of the odd cases. However, Fraser (1988) demonstrates that if we assume that a kite flyer utters Wind is wind in response to a friend who complains that the wind is coming from the wrong direction, the friend could understand what the kite flyer meant. One possible interpretation of the utterance is that wind cannot be controlled by human beings. This shows that we need contextual information if we are to comprehend a tautological utterance.
And finally, Wierzbicka describes the meanings of tautological utterances without examining them in concrete contexts. I have been wondering why she considers a syntactic structure to have a specific meaning as in (7a)-(7c). For example, she explains that *A rule is a rule*, which complies with the pattern *(ART) N is (ART) N* in (7c), means ‘obligation’. It seems to me that the meaning derives not from the form itself, but from the noun *rule* in the form. As *N* in the pattern *(ART) N is (ART) N*, she lists *rule, bet and father*. To some degree, these nouns appear to entail ‘obligation’ in her sense. However, some nouns do not entail such a meaning but they are nevertheless used in the pattern *(ART) N is (ART) N*. For instance, the nouns *robot* in (9a) and (9b) are not linked to ‘obligation’ but are used in the pattern. As we have observed, their interpretations depend on the context rather than on what fills the subject or predicate in the sentence.

As is obvious from the counterexamples above, Wierzbicka’s proposal should be rejected. Wherever possible, she refuses to accept pragmatic contributions to the interpretation of tautologies. In fact, however, tautological utterances are understood differently in different contexts and they cannot be analyzed without their contexts. The next section will focus on non-radical approaches.

2.3 Non-Radical Approach

An approach that accepts both pragmatic and semantic contributions to tautological utterance comprehension is called a non-radical approach. Fraser is often regarded as a researcher who takes this approach. Fraser (1988) argues that the nominal tautology NP-*be*-NP, has the semantic information of (10) and functions as evoking in a hearer a viewpoint concerning the objects to which the NP in the sentence refers.

(10) An English nominal tautology signals that the speaker intends that the hearer recognize:
(i) that the speaker holds some view towards all objects referenced by the NP;
(ii) that the speaker believes that the hearer can recognize this particular view;
(iii) that this view is relevant to the conversation.

(Fraser 1988: 217-218)

A nominal tautology “signals that the speaker intends to convey the belief that participants share a view towards some aspect of the objects referenced by the sentence noun phrase, and wishes to bring this belief to the hearer’s awareness” (ibid.: 218).

As discussed in 2.2, Fraser proves that it is easy for hearers to understand the expression *Wind is wind*, which Wierzbicka considers to be inappropriate. Fraser also suggests that whether or not (11a)-(11d) are felicitous depends on the meanings of *be*.
If a tautological utterance is acceptable, be in the sentence is understood to have the meaning of *to act like* or *to behave like*.

Fraser provides an account of how the nominal tautology NP,be-NP, is interpreted. However, there are three weak points in his proposal. First, it is unclear what NP refers to in his generalized interpretation process of (10). One possible choice is that NP is the subject of the sentence. The other is that NP is the predicate. Clearly, the two nouns are formally identical in tautological sentences but they work differently depending on their position. Consider again the example *Wind is wind*. It would be interpreted as communicating that wind cannot be controlled by human beings. In this case, the first wind refers to the wind that is now blowing at the utterance point and the second wind refers to the fact that human beings cannot control the wind. These two uses of wind express different things. Thus, Fraser needs to clearly define NP in his formula.

Second, as some researchers have already pointed out, his claim is too general to explain the unique feature of tautologies (cf. Ward and Hirschberg 1991, Tsujimoto 1996, Nishikawa 2003). Consider, for instance, the example *Juliet is the sun*. This metaphorical expression suggests that Juliet is kind, warm, beautiful etc., depending on the context. It is in line with Fraser’s generalization. The English metaphor signals that the speaker of *Juliet is the sun* intends the hearer to recognize: (i) that the speaker holds some view towards the person referenced by Juliet or properties referenced by *(the) sun*; (ii) that the speaker believes that the hearer can recognize this particular view; and (iii) that this view is relevant to the conversation. The interpretation process proposed by Fraser fits naturally into cases other than tautologies. Next, I will discuss cognitive linguistic approaches.

### 2.4 Cognitive Linguistic Approach

A cognitive linguistic approach is one of the new ways of dealing with tautological utterances. Adopting the concept of frame model, Mizuta (1995, 1996) discusses the process of interpreting an apparently meaningless tautological sentence as meaningful, and argues that the comprehension depends on contexts and shared knowledge. Consider the following exchange between John and Mike:

(12) John: Oh, it’s heavy! Would you bring anyone powerful?
     Mike: Sure. Mary was around here. I’ll bring her.
Mike: Don't you know her power?
John: Not actually. But anyway, a woman is a woman.
Mike: Well …, it might be true / you’ll see the answer. (Mizuta 1996: 77)

Suppose that John wants someone to help carry a heavy pack and Mike advises him to ask Mary. In this context, Mike thinks that he should ask Mary to help since she is a physically strong woman. On the other hand, John thinks that she should not be asked to help since “In general, a woman is weak in muscular power. (So is Mary.)” (Mizuta 1996: 77) Mizuta explains how this interpretation of (12) arises as follows. The speaker John would have the knowledge about the category MAN and the category WOMAN modeled in Figure 1.

With regard to power, his knowledge of WOMAN (the upper category of MARY) is activated in his mind by Mike’s utterance Sure. Mary was around here. I’ll bring her in line 2 of the above example. Then, the relative weakness of women shown in Figure 1 occurs to him, and he thinks that she should not be asked to help. When this interpretation is acceptable, the speaker John is referring to a general image of the physical strength of women (e.g. the relative weakness of women). He indicates Mary’s weakness, and applies the general idea to Mary.

On the other hand, the hearer Mike shares both the knowledge shown in Figure 1 and the context in which the utterances in (12) are exchanged, with the speaker John. Mike evokes an image of the physical strength of women from his own knowledge, based on the context. Then, he interprets John’s utterance a woman is a woman as referring to the general idea of female weakness, and understands John’s implication that Mary is weak in terms of physical strength, applying the general idea to Mary.

Based on the above observation, Mizuta argues that the predicate X in the sentence X
is X represents the stereotypical attribution of the category concerned in a given situation, and concludes that hearers can understand the stereotypical attribution because of shared knowledge and the context. Certainly, the hearer’s interpretation depends on context. However, it does not always depend on shared knowledge. Members of the same cultural group often share many experiences and views, but beyond this common framework, individuals tend to be highly idiosyncratic. Differences in life naturally lead to differences in memorized information about an object.

Furthermore, Mizuta observes widely used tautological utterances such as a woman is woman and promise is promise. These examples lead relatively easily to stereotypical attributions about woman and promise based on the category WOMAN and PROMISE. The explanation is that the predicates woman and promise represent the stereotypical attribution of the category concerned in a given situation. However, when a speaker produces an unusual tautological utterance, it cannot be said that the predicate X represents stereotypical attributions of the category concerned in a certain situation. For example, consider (13):

(13) Senior : 5′ 06″ is 5′ 06″.
    Reservist: But… . (David Collard, Annapolis)

Suppose that reservists have to complete a final race within five minutes, but one of them could not. A reservist then asks his senior to pass the disqualified person on the test. The senior rejects the request by saying 5′ 06″ is 5′ 06″. In this situation, it is difficult to select stereotypical attributions of the category 5′ 06″. However, the utterance can be interpreted. Therefore, the predicate X does not always represent stereotypical properties of the category concerned in a given situation. Mizuta’s claim must therefore be rejected. Next, let us discuss relevance theoretic approaches.

2.5 Relevance Theoretic Approach

In this approach, Higashimori and Wilson (1996) first mentioned that tautological utterances would be treated as “reminders, implicating that an obvious truth has been overlooked” (ibid.: 10). Subsequently, studies adopting relevance theoretic approaches have progressed little.

Nishikawa (2003) argues that a tautological utterance A is A is interpreted via the pragmatic process of ad hoc concept construction. The interpretation is summarized as follows:

(14) a. Utterance: A is A.
    b. Explicature: A is A*.
    c. Higher-level explicature:
       The speaker intends the hearer to know that A is A*.
    d. Implicatures: (They depend on the contexts.) (Nishikawa 2003: 53)
The subject A is generically interpreted, and the predicate A expresses contextually adjusted concepts but not encoded lexical concepts. Consider (15):

(15) [Mary finds a penny on the street and picks it up.]
    Tom: Why did you pick it up? It’s just a penny.
    Mary: Money is money. (ibid.: 54)

Following her analysis, in (15), Mary thinks that money is very important regardless of how much it is and expresses a scornful or critical attitude towards Tom, who does not consider a penny to be important. In this case, the concept MONEY communicated by the predicate money is more specific than the concept that it originally encodes. The concept is interpreted as MONEY* as in (15a):

(15) a. Explicature: Money is MONEY*.
    b. Higher-level explicature:
       Mary intends Tom to know that money is MONEY*.
    c. Implicated premise:
       We should not undervalue anything that has value.
    d. Implicated conclusions:
       Even a penny has value. We should not undervalue a penny. (ibid.)

In (15), the concept MONEY* derived from the original encoded concept MONEY is connected to something important. Nishikawa’s claim appears to be promising since it could explain the concrete process of understanding a nominal tautological utterance. However, there are two problems with it. First, the word they in the generalized interpretation process of (14d) is metalinguistically defined. This shows that she thinks that the meaning of nominal tautologies appears only at the level of explicatures, and she does not recognize the importance of stipulating what type of implicature is derived in the interpretation process. Second, she insists that the subject A is interpreted generically. However, it is not always generic. Consider the following conversation between a woman and her mother in law:

(16) Daughter in law: So, I was talking to my dad about Jack potentially having an identity crisis, being half Japanese and half British, and not being either... and my dad just said ‘Jack is Jack’, which I thought was a very good way of thinking.
    Mother in law: (Silence)
    Daughter in law: Anyway, what time did you say we would have tea?

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Suppose that a woman is talking about her son with her mother in law in the lounge. The mother in law tends to have a stereotypical view about other cultures and the daughter wants to stop her saying inappropriate things about her mixed race baby son. The daughter cites her own father’s comment, Jack is Jack. In this example, the name Jack is a proper noun and therefore has no generic use. Based on this observation, Nishikawa’s analysis should be rejected.

3. Tautology as Objection

As already discussed in the previous section, there have been several earlier studies on English nominal tautologies. They provide insightful suggestions, but cannot correctly predict the interpretation of nominal tautology in English. In this section, I will examine English nominal tautology data and pin down the kind of function that they all have in common. At the end of this section, I will propose that the function of the expressional form A is A is to object to an utterance or a thought that is attributed to someone other than the speaker at the utterance point.

To clarify the A is A interpretation process, I shall informally use the following notations: P is an assumption pre-existing in the context and Q is an assumption held by the speaker. Consider (17) and (18):

(17) "What is this?" the pilot demanded.

"A ten-thousand-euro bearer bond drawn on the Vatican Bank."

The pilot looked dubious.

"It’s the same as cash."

"Only cash is cash," the pilot said, handing the bond back.

(Dan Brown, The Da Vinci Code)

(18) ‘Speedy!’ shouted Powell into his radio. ‘Come here!’

Speedy looked up and saw them. He stopped suddenly and remained standing for a moment. Then he turned and ran away, kicking up dust behind him. Over their radios, Donovan and Powell heard him singing a song.

Donovan said weakly, ‘Greg, he’s crazy.’

‘He’s not crazy,’ Powell said. ‘A robot’s only a robot. There’s something wrong with him that’s confusing his brain patterns. Once we find out what it is, then we can fix it.’

(= (9b))

First, in (17) quoted from the novel The Da Vinci Code, the main character Langdon is trying to hand the pilot a bearer bond, but the pilot doubts that it is genuine and refuses to accept it.
In this context, Langdon thinks that P [the bond is the same as cash]. On the other hand, by uttering cash is cash, the pilot communicates that Q [the bond is not the same as cash]. In (18), two mechanics Donovan and Powell were looking for the lost robot Speedy and they finally found it out of order. In this situation, Donovan thinks that P [Speedy is crazy]. On the other hand, by uttering A robot’s a robot, Powell communicates that Q [Speedy is not crazy (but has something wrong with it)]. These above two examples are used to express an objection to the preceding utterance.

Next, consider the following example. It has a preceding utterance but it is not used to object to a preceding utterance.

(19) Cheri Brush : He’s taking a lot of ribbing from the guys in the neighborhood. I will tell you they’re calling him Larry Poppins.
Dan Harris : And do you … you don’t care when you hear that?
Larry Brush : A job is a job. I don’t care about it, you know. You know, ’cuz nothing … female/male, it doesn’t matter. It’s work. (= (4))

In (19), Larry Brush, who is working as a nurse after being laid off, is giving an interview to a news program discussing new gender rules. People in general (including his neighbors) tease him since a male nurse falls outside traditional gender rules. In this situation, it is assumed that people in general (including his neighbors) thinks that P [a job as a nurse is for women]. On the other hand, by uttering A job is a job, Larry Brush communicates that Q [a job as a nurse is not only for women]. The example is used to express an objection to the thought of people in general.

Furthermore, a tautological utterance does not always have a preceding utterance. Consider (20):

(20) Janet and Mike were really generous; they treated us to an elaborate dinner. I had a boiled lobster … I’d never had my food look at me before I was going to eat it … It was quite intimidating. However, food is food, and eventually I figured out how to eat the little guy. (Kuno and Takami 2004: 5-6)

In (20), suppose that at a restaurant, a woman had been scared of a whole boiled lobster staring her but after all managed to eat the lobster. The woman (that is, the speaker of food is food) previously thought that P [the lobster was a living creature]. On the other hand, by uttering food is food, she currently thinks that Q [the lobster is not a living creature (but an edible thing)]. The example is used to express an objection to the speaker’s previous thought.

It can be said from this that the function of all the A is A examples from (17) to (20) is to express an objection to an utterance or a thought that is attributed to someone other than
the speaker at the utterance point. For instance, in *The Da Vinci Code* example (17), the assumption $P$ "the bond is the same as cash" contradicts the assumption $Q$ "the bond is not the same as cash". The utterance *cash is cash* is interpreted as expressing an objection to the utterance attributed to the hearer (that is, Langdon). Likewise, in the mechanics example (18), the assumption $P$ "Speedy is crazy" contradicts the assumption $Q$ "Speedy is not crazy". The utterance *A robot's a robot* is interpreted as expressing an objection to the utterance attributed to the hearer (that is, Donovan). Furthermore, in the news program example (19), the assumption $P$ "a job as a nurse is for women" contradicts the assumption $Q$ "a job as a nurse is not only for women". The utterance *A job is a job* is interpreted as expressing an objection to the thought attributed to people in general. In the lobster example (20), the assumption $P$ "the lobster is a living creature" contradicts the assumption $Q$ "the lobster is not a living creature". The utterance *food is food* is interpreted as expressing an objection to the thought attributed to the speaker herself in the past.

From the above observation, it is clear that we can find many examples with *A is A*, whose function is to express an objection to an utterance or a thought that is attributed to someone other than the speaker at the utterance point.

Given this finding, it may be possible that there are two factors involved in the interpretation process of English nominal tautology: objection and attributiveness. Briefly stated, the expressional form *A is A* conveys the speaker’s intention to object to an attributed utterance or thought.

### 4. Conclusion

In this paper, I have critically discussed previous studies on nominal tautology that have adopted several approaches: radical pragmatic approaches, radical semantic approaches, non-radical approaches, cognitive linguistic approaches and relevance theoretic approaches. They all fail to explain the process of interpreting nominal tautology. I presented appropriate counterexamples and refuted their claims.

Furthermore, I examined the data for *A is A* and found that the function of the expressional form is to object to an utterance or a thought that is attributed to someone other than the speaker at the utterance point. It may be said from this that there are two factors involved in the process of interpreting English nominal tautology: objection and attributiveness. My future research will deal with how large a range of English nominal tautology data can be covered by this function.

### Notes

1. This paper focuses on *A is A*, which is not embedded in other sentences.
2. Sperber and Wilson (1995) assumed that there are three types of pragmatic processes involved in explication derivation: disambiguation, reference assignment and enrichment.
Carston (2002, 2004) has developed pragmatic processes and proposes that there are four processes involved in deriving expicature: disambiguation, saturation, free enrichment and ad hoc concept construction. The process of ad hoc concept construction involves replacing an encoded lexical concept appearing in a logical form with a contextually adjusted one. For details, see Carston (2002, 2004).

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An Examination of the Controversy over English Nominal Tautologies

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Many researchers have been fascinated by nominal tautological expressions such as Business is business and War is war and have attempted to solve the mystery they present with radical pragmatic approaches, radical semantic approaches, and non-radical approaches. Moreover, in recent years, two new waves have emerged: cognitive linguistic approaches and relevance theoretic approaches. Several related articles have been published on English nominal tautology. However, there is controversy as to how the expressions are interpreted, and no one has succeeded in characterizing their interpretations properly. Is it possible to include cases of English nominal tautology in a unified viewpoint analysis?

As a starting point for clarifying the overall picture of the interpretation process of English nominal tautology, this paper examines previous English nominal tautology studies, and attempts to identify their problematic points. In the course of observing the data in detail, I find that the function of the English nominal tautology A is A is to express an objection to an utterance or a thought that is attributed to someone other than the speaker at the utterance point. On the basis of this finding, I suggest that there are two factors involved in the process of interpreting English nominal tautology: objection and attributiveness. How large a range of English nominal tautology data can be covered by this function will be a subject of my future research.