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Conditionalized DPs

Since at least Donnellan 1966 we know that utterances containing definite descriptions can make true claims even if the definite description itself fails to denote. In this talk, I investigate conditionalized DPs, i.e., DPs followed by an if-clause as in (1).

- (1) a. Her spouse, if they ever got married, just walked into my store.
 b. The head of accounting, if Campbell gets fired, is currently working in London. (Frana 2017)

I argue that examples such as these point to the existence of an epistemic necessity operator scoping over the content of the DP (but not its intended referent), and it is this operator that can be restricted by a conditional antecedent. This account correctly predicts that it is not only definite descriptions which can be conditionalized in this way, but any DP that refers to an individual.

I show that the conditional is not at issue and can be analyzed in a multi-dimensional semantics such as the one proposed in Potts 2005, similarly to appositive relative clauses.