The Right Frontier Constraint as Conditional

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Abstract. The *Right Frontier Constraint* (RFC) claims that antecedents are only available for anaphoric reference if they are located at the right hand side of any level of a linearly ordered discourse parse tree. We show that this constraint does hold only under certain conditions — which, however, apply for most circumstances of everyday talk. The data of our analysis in which the RFC does not hold come from a corpus of chat communication. From our findings we argue that the RFC is best viewed as a conditional constraint.

Most theories of discourse employ one or another way of respecting the *Right Frontier Constraint* (RFC). Polanyi (1988) for instance already explicitly built her LDM to respect the RFC, as well as more recent grammars of discourse do (Gardent 1998, Asher and Lascarides 2003).

An example where the RFC applies is the following short discourse:

(1) a. Max had a great evening yesterday.
    b. He had a great meal.
    c. He ate salmon.
    d. He devoured lots of cheese.
    e. He then won a dancing competition.

Example 1 has to be analysed as follows: (1a) is elaborated by (1b) and (1e), which in turn form a narration. (1b) is elaborated by (1c) and (1d), again a narrating sequence. Attempting to attach the sentence

(1) f. It was a beautiful pink.

to the discourse above intuitively and in accordance with the RFC results in a reduced acceptability. The only semantically adequate antecedent, *salmon* in (1c), is not at the right frontier of the discourse and, hence, blocked.

Sassen (2005) explored whether chat communication, as an instance of a non-traditional communication system makes an exception when it comes to the RFC. The data used for the analysis was taken from 28 logfiles of the Allegra Chat, a chit chat that has ceased to exist and 8 extracts from the advisory chat of the BeraNet (http://www.beranet.de/). The Allegra-Chat offers its users a whisper lounge, i.e. the opportunity to communicate privately, of which whispered messages could be integrated into the analysis.

In order to assess Sassen's procedure, it is helpful to have a rough understanding of Polanyi's LDM. According to Polanyi (1988), a discourse is made up