

Title: **Group terms and the meaning of *meet***

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Barker (1992) argues that group terms like *committee* denote atomic entities that lack internal structure by demonstrating that they behave differently from coextensional plurals. Though this conclusion has been widely adopted, there is a better explanation for Barker's data.

Barker's argument focuses entirely on group terms as subjects of the verb *meet*. He observes that, in a context in which the group term *the committee* is coextensional with the plural *the doctors*, the sentences in (1) fail to be mutually entailing.

1. a. The committee met on Tuesday.
- b. The doctors met on Tuesday.

Barker uses this non-equivalence to argue that group terms do not denote Linkian pluralities -- like definite plurals do -- but rather groups, a distinct ontological entity.

Barker's argument relies on the assumption that the verb in (1) is extensional, operating on the extensions of its DP arguments. In a footnote, Barker admits "there are many seemingly innocent predicates which are not extensional enough for our purposes", e.g. *be on strike*. But Barker rejects the possibility that *meet* is such a verb (p81).

There is an interpretation of *meet* that operates on extensions. The sentences in (2) involve coextensional subjects and are, consequently, mutually entailing.

2. a. The doctors met (each other) on Tuesday. Doug introduced them.
- b. The committee met (each other) on Tuesday. Doug introduced them.

But this equivalence doesn't hold for a different sort of *meet* sentence, (3), in a context in which *the committee* and *the doctors* are coextensional.

3. a. The committee met to decide policy/operate.
- b. The doctors met to decide policy/operate.

In (3), that the two subject DPs are coextensional isn't sufficient to make the sentences mutually entailing in the context.

The main difference between the sentences in (2)/(3) is the presence of an infinitival relative clause (IRC). A corresponding difference is one of interpretation: while the meeting events described in (2) effectively consist of introductions or first-time meetings, those described in (3) consist of assemblies or congregations which may or may not involve introductions.

Bhatt (1999) studies the syntactic and semantic behavior of IRCs in embedded *wh*-phrases, e.g. *Airlines decide when to retire their planes*. He argues that IRCs introduce into a semantic derivation a covert modal operator which introduces quantification over bouletic accessible worlds as well as an implied association between the event denoted by a verb and e.g. satisfaction of the relevant goal. This theory (and recent adaptations, Hackl & Nissenbaum 2012) predicts that VPs modified by IRCs are modal and therefore not extensional.

Barker's sentences in (1) do not contain overt IRCs. But they're interpreted as if they do: their salient readings describe events in which the committee and doctors met to satisfy some goal, not events in which the relevant individuals were introduced to each other. This suggests that they're interpreted with covert IRCs, with context valuing the bouletic accessibility relation introduced by the covert modal. This means that there's an independent explanation for Barker's observation.

While group terms and plurals demonstrate other differences (like number agreement), the ability of *meet* to receive a modal interpretation significantly weakens Barker's claim that we need to posit distinct semantic entities for them.

Barker, C. 1992. "Group terms in English: representing groups as atoms." *Journal of Semantics* 9: 69-93.

Bhatt, R. 1999. *Covert modality in non-finite contexts*. PhD Thesis, University of Pennsylvania.

Hackl, M. and Nissenbaum, 2012. "A modal ambiguity in *for*-infinitival relative clauses." *Natural Language Semantics* 20:59-81.