

Why is it *the CIA* but not **the NASA*? Acronyms, abbreviations and definite descriptions.

Heidi Harley, University of Arizona
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Abstract

It is argued that there is more regularity in the syntactic behavior of initialisms than might appear to be the case from an initial overview. When a definite description becomes an initialism, its syntactic category is predictable depending on whether the initialism is an acronym or an abbreviation. Acronyms behave like proper names and drop the definite determiner, while abbreviations continue to behave like compound Ns, and retain the determiner. A broad range of naturally occurring example sentences are adduced to illustrate the contrast. Two particularly prominent classes of exceptions to the abbreviation rule are argued to be subcases of the special class of bare locative nominals in English; the syntactic behavior of less clear-cut categories of initialisms from definite descriptions is also discussed.

It has long been noted that there are significant differences in the behavior of the two main classes of initialisms in English: *acronyms*, where the sequence of initials taken from the source is pronounced as a phonological word, and *abbreviations*, where each letter in the initialism is pronounced individually. We will adopt the criteria for these definitions proposed in Cannon (1989). A typical example of the former is the disease *AIDS*, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, /eɪdz/, while a typical example of the latter is *DOA*, Dead On Arrival, /dɪjəweɪ/. For a comprehensive overview of the patterns exhibited by acronyms and abbreviations in English, see Cannon (1989). This paper explores the generality of one tendency noted by Cannon: the fact that acronyms are more likely than abbreviations to be proper nouns: 54% of acronyms in Cannon's corpus were proper nouns (op. cit., p.112), compared to only 13 % of abbreviations (op. cit, p. 109).ⁱ

Scholars have long been interested in the various conditions which are involved in determining when an initialism becomes an acronym and when it remains an abbreviation; phonotactic plausibility and length of initialism were identified early on as important factors (Baum, 1955). When an initialism becomes an acronym, McCully and Holmes (1988) showed that there are quite general processes which govern the way they are pronounced. Here, we will investigate the syntactic consequences of this process. What determines the categorial status of an initialism? In particular, we will focus on

initialisms which are derived from source phrases which are definite descriptions. We will see that there seems to be a fairly general process determining the categorial status of initialisms which distinguishes acronyms from abbreviations.

Acronyms and abbreviations can be formed from phrases of almost any category, but nominal phrases, particularly compounds, are by far the most frequent source. In Cannon's corpus, 92 percent of abbreviations and 98 percent of acronyms have nominal sources. One of the most striking differences between the two, as noted above, is in the percentage of acronyms which function as proper names, compared to the percentage of abbreviations which do so.

A proper name is simply a nominal expression that normally has the syntactic distribution of a pronoun or definite description. For example, proper names, used referentially, do not co-occur with a determiner or quantifier (**the John Smith, *some Mary Jones*). Common nouns, whether they are count or mass, may co-occur with determiners and quantifiers, and must co-occur with a definite determiner to refer uniquely. Essentially, a proper name functions syntactically like a noun phrase (NPⁱⁱ), rather than a common noun (N); its syntactic category is different.

This difference could arise for various reasons. The most obvious possibility is that the source phrases of the initialisms in question themselves function as noun phrases, i.e. function as proper names. While this is true some cases, like those illustrated in (1) and (2), it does not account for cases like that in (3), where the source is not itself a noun phrase. In (3), the source phrase is a compound contained within a definite description.ⁱⁱⁱ

Quotations are given for each initialism which illustrate its use. In the quotations in (1) and (2), where the source of the initialism is itself an NP, replacing the initialism with the phrase that is the source of its component initials results in a grammatical English sentence. In the quotation in (3), however, directly replacing the acronym with the compound which is the source of its initials results in an ill-formed sentence; the definite determiner *the* is missing. The acronym functions as an NP although the compound which is its source functions as an N:

1. NP abbreviation NP source:
 - (a) AOL America On-Line
 - (i) "AOL becomes the first online service to release a Windows version of its software." (AOL, 2002)
 - (ii) America On Line becomes the first online service...

2. NP acronym NP source:
 - (a) PETA People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals
 - (i) "PETA filed a defamation suit last December against O'Donnell..." (Grossberg, 2001)
 - (ii) People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals filed a defamation...

3. NP acronym, N source
 - (a) NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organization
 - (i) "What can NATO do to help to stabilize the situation in Afghanistan?" (Robertson, 2003).
 - (ii) *What can North Atlantic Treaty Organization do to help....

If the difference in the percentage of acronyms and abbreviations which function as proper names was to be explained by a difference in the category of their source phrases, as in (1) and (2), it would have to be the case that acronyms have a strong tendency to be derived from source phrases which are themselves proper names. In fact, as we will see, proper name acronyms are often derived from source phrases which are not proper names, but are rather definite descriptions, like the example in (3).

What is particularly interesting is that the situation which arises in (3) is characteristic of acronyms but not of abbreviations. Except for a few classes of exceptions which we will consider below, abbreviations tend to retain the categorial status of their source phrase: if the source phrase is an NP, the abbreviation is also an NP; if the source phrase is an N, the abbreviation is also an N. That is, if an organizational name which requires a definite determiner is abbreviated, the abbreviation generally also requires a definite determiner. A typical example of an abbreviation of a compound within a definite description is given in (4); a quotation illustrating its syntactic status as an N is given in (4a), as well as sentence illustrating its ungrammaticality as an NP:

4. N abbreviation N source:
 - (a) the CIA the Central Intelligence Agency
 - (i) "Brennan joined the CIA in 1980 and has held a variety of senior positions in the Agency's Directorate of Intelligence (DI) and the Directorate of Operations (DO)." (CIA, 2003)

(ii) *Brennan joined CIA in 1980...

In contrast, when a phrase which requires a definite determiner becomes an acronym, the acronym does not require a definite determiner. That is, when the source phrase of an acronym is of category N (usually a compound) and occurs in a definite description that refers to a unique entity, the acronym of that N becomes an NP. This latter tendency is so prevalent that it essentially has the force of a rule: acronyms of definite descriptions always become names. While abbreviations of definite descriptions generally don't become names, we will see that there is more flexibility with abbreviations; sometimes they do become names.

It is often noted that abbreviations are less 'obscure' than acronyms; the source of an acronym is often completely inaccessible to many of its users, as in the famous cases of *radar* and *scuba*. So, for example, Ronnenberger-Sibold (1999:108) notes that "...alphabetical pronunciation impl[ies] the structural information that the input of the shortening was probably a compound or a phrase and that the letters of the acronym correspond to the first letters of important constituents of this compound or phrase." She goes on (using 'acronym' as a general cover term for both acronyms and abbreviations):

"This is probably why, for official use, alphabetical pronunciation is preferred to phonemic pronunciation in acronyms, even if the latter were possible...However, this information is very poor and uncertain, for one knows neither the rest of the constituents nor their grammatical role in the input, nor whether all constituents or only a selection have been abbreviated and what were the selectional criteria...Therefore, such acronyms are classed here with the completely opaque ones."

Here, as in most work addressing the issue, the conclusion is that there is a tendency for the syntactic and semantic properties of abbreviations to be more 'phrasal' than acronyms, which are more 'lexical', but that this tendency is gradient: acronyms can be phrasal, and abbreviations can be lexical. What I hope to show here is that, when the source phrase is a definite description, the syntactic properties of the initialism are determined largely by whether it is an acronym or an abbreviation, independently of the degree of semantic lexicalization ('idiomatization') that has occurred. Certainly it is the case that commonly used abbreviations can lose their connection to their source phrase: the use of the abbreviation *GOP* to refer to the Republican Party in the United States is

almost entirely opaque to most of my undergraduate students at the University of Arizona, who are surprised to learn its source phrase ('Grand Old Party'). Nonetheless, this idiomatization is not associated with a change in syntactic status of *GOP*: as an abbreviation, rather than an acronym, it continues to behave syntactically like a compound noun, not a proper name, requiring the accompanying definite determiner (*the GOP announced today...*, not **GOP announced today...*).

30 examples of acronyms whose source phrases are compound Ns within definite descriptions are presented in (5-35), and example sentences illustrating their determinerless use are provided, taken primarily from the relevant organizations' home pages, as well as example sentences where the acronym is spelled out word-by-word and takes a determiner. Finally, grammaticality judgments are given illustrating that the acronym cannot co-occur with a determiner and that its source phrase cannot go determinerless. In (36-65), 30 examples of abbreviations whose source phrases are compound Ns within definite descriptions are listed, along with example sentences illustrating their use with determiners, and grammaticality judgments showing that both the abbreviation and the source phrase are ungrammatical without the determiner.

Acronym Source Phrase

5. NASA the National Aeronautics and Space Administration
 - (i) "NASA released a new book that shows the complex and sometimes surprising changes in the brain and nervous system that allow astronauts to adapt to weightlessness." (Beasley and Watson, 2003)
 - (ii) "October 1, 1958, the official start of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), was the beginning of a rich history of unique scientific and technological achievements in human space flight, aeronautics, space science, and space applications." (Launius and Garber, 2001)
 - (iii)*The NASA released a new book...
 - (iv)*National Aeronautics and Space Administration has released a new book..."

6. OPEC the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
 - (i) "OPEC had its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, in the first five years of its existence." (OPEC 2000)
 - (ii) "The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) is a permanent, intergovernmental Organization, created at the Baghdad Conference on September 10–14, 1960, by Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela." (*ibid.*)
 - (iii)*Welcome to the official website of the OPEC...

- (iv)*Welcome to the official website of Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries.
7. RADA the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts
- (i) “I’m still at school, but would like to apply to RADA.” (Ashbee 2002a)
 - (ii) “A brief history of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts.” (Ashbee 2002b)
 - (iii)*I’m still at school but would like to apply to the RADA.
 - (iv)*I’m still at school but would like to apply to Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts.
8. ASLEF the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen
- (i) “ASLEF was founded in 1880.” (ASLEF 2003)
 - (ii) “Your Petitioner, the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (“ASLEF”), is a trades union representing train and tram drivers throughout the United Kingdom.” (Murray, 2002)
 - (iii)*The ASLEF was founded in 1880...
 - (iv)*Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen was founded in 1880..
9. APSA the American Political Science Association
- (i) “Because of this, APSA is changing the annual membership cycle.” (APSA 2003a)
 - (ii) “With more than 13,500 members residing in over 70 countries worldwide, the American Political Science Association is the world’s largest professional organization for the study of politics.” (APSA 2003b)
 - (iii)*The APSA is changing the annual membership cycle.
 - (iv)*American Political Science Association is changing the annual membership cycle.”
10. WCCFL /wɪkfəl/ the West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics
- (i) “You will be responsible for paying for your own meal, but WCCFL will provide transportation...” (Sanders, 2002)
 - (ii) “The permanent home of the West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics” (Buell, 2002).
 - (iii)*The WCCFL will provide transportation...
 - (iv)*West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics will provide transportation...
11. ARCA the Automobile Racing Club of America
- (i) “ARCA has now sanctioned races in 17 states...” (ARCA 2003)
 - (ii) “The MARC name goes away in favor of ARCA, the Automobile Racing Club of America.” (*ibid.*)
 - (iii)*The ARCA has now sanctioned races in 17 states...
 - (iv)*Automobile Racing Club of America has now sanctioned races in 17 states...

12. ASMI the American Sports Medicine Institute
- (i) “However, non-profit foundations like ASMI have limited budgets..” (ASMI, 2002)
 - (ii) “The American Sports Medicine Institute in collaboration with the Alabama Sports Medicine and Orthopaedic Center and HEALTHSOUTH Medicine Center, has initiated a Primary Care Sports Medicine Fellowship in order to fulfill a need in society to develop in non-orthopaedic physicians a competency in the total care of those of all ages and of every level of proficiency who sustain or develop activity-related, musculoskeletal injuries and conditions.” (King, 2001)
 - (iii)*Non-profit foundations like the ASMI have limited budgets...”
 - (iv)*Non-profit foundations like American Sports Medicine Institute have...”
13. UNICEF the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund
- (i) “UNICEF helps children get the care and stimulation they need in the early years of life and encourages families to educate girls as well as boys.” (UNICEF, 2003)
 - (ii) “Created by the United Nations General Assembly in 1946 to help children after World War II in Europe, UNICEF was first known as the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund.” (*ibid.*)
 - (iii)*The UNICEF protects children and their rights...
 - (iv)*United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund protects children...
14. CEPPPO the Chemical Emergency Preparedness and Prevention Office
- (i) “To that end, CEPPPO works with numerous Federal, State, local, and Tribal governments; industry groups; environmental groups; labor organizations; and community groups to help them better understand the risks posed by chemicals in their communities, to manage and reduce those risks, and to deal with emergencies.” (CEPPO 2002)
 - (ii) “About the Chemical Emergency Preparedness and Prevention Office” (*ibid.*)
 - (iii)*The CEPPPO created a program with substantial flexibility...
 - (iv)*Chemical Emergency Preparedness and Prevention Office created a program...
15. CITES the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species
- (i) “...the commitment of 145 member countries to the principles established by CITES.” (US Fish and Wildlife, 2003)
 - (ii) “...the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, a treaty in effect since 1975.” (*ibid.*)
 - (iii)*... principles established by the CITES
 - (iv)*... principles established by Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species
16. ERIC the Educational Resources Information Center
- (i) “ERIC produces a variety of publications...” (ERIC 2002)

- (ii) “The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), funded by OERI, is a nationwide information network that acquires, catalogs, summarizes, and provides access to education information from all sources.” (*ibid.*)
 - (iii)*The ERIC produces a variety of publications...
 - (iv)*Educational Resources Information Center produces a variety...
17. FASAB the Federal Accounting Standards Advisory Board
- (i) “This website provides access to all publications issued by FASAB...” (Nicholson, 2002)
 - (ii) “The Federal Accounting Standards Advisory Board promulgates accounting principles for federal government reporting entities.” (*ibid.*)
 - (iii)*...publications issued by the FASAB.
 - (iv)*...publications issued by Federal Accounting Standards Advisory Board
18. NAFTA the North American Free Trade Agreement
- (i) “NAFTA has shown it works for America...” (US Trade Representative, 1999)
 - (ii) “The North American Free Trade Agreement points us toward a 21st century in which our ties of peace and cooperation with our neighbors, Canada and Mexico, are stronger, our people more prosperous, and our quality of life higher.” (*ibid.*)
 - (iii)*The NAFTA has shown it works for America...
 - (iv)*North American Free Trade Agreement has shown it works...
19. NIAID the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases
- (i) “NIAID has a distinguished record within the U.S. Public Health Service, beginning with its roots in the Hygienic Laboratory established in 1887, the predecessor of the modern NIH” (NIAID 2002)
 - (ii) “The National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) is a component of the National Institutes of Health (NIH).” (*ibid.*)
 - (iii)*The NIAID has a distinguished record...
 - (iv)*National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases has a...
20. UNESCO the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
- (i) “To fulfill its mandate, UNESCO performs five principal functions” (UNESCO 2000)
 - (ii) “In consequence whereof they do hereby create the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization for the purpose of advancing, through the educational and scientific and cultural relations of the peoples of the world, the objectives of international peace and of the common welfare of mankind for which the United nations organization was established and which its Charter proclaims.” (UNESCO 2002)
 - (iii)*The UNESCO performs...
 - (iv)*United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization performs...

21. ALEC the American Legislative Exchange Council
- (i) “In 1982, ALEC began developing its first health care initiatives”
 - (ii) “The mission of the American Legislative Exchange Council is to advance the Jeffersonian principles of free markets, limited government, federalism and individual liberty among America's state legislators.”
 - (iii)*In 1982, the ALEC began developing...
 - (iv)*In 1982, American Legislative Exchange Council began developing..
22. ASCII the American Standard Code for Information Interchange
- (i) “ASCII was actually designed for use with teletypes.” (ASCIItable.com, 2003)
 - (ii) “In 1963, ASA announced the American Standard Code for Information Interchange” (Searle, 1999).
 - (iii)*The ASCII was actually designed for use with...
 - (iv)American Standard Code for Information Interchange was actually designed...^{iv}
23. COBRA the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act
- (i) “Under COBRA, a group health plan ordinarily is defined as a plan that...” (Cobra Insurance .com, 2003)
 - (ii) “Congress passed the landmark Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act” (*ibid.*)
 - (iii)*Under the COBRA, a group health plan is...
 - (iv)*Under Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act, a group health plan...
24. FRAME the Fund for the Replacement of Animals in Medical Experiments
- (i) “FRAME considers that the current scale of live animal experimentation is unacceptable and should not be allowed to continue.” (FRAME, 2002a)
 - (ii) “In September 1969, they founded The Fund for the Replacement of Animals in Medical Experiments (FRAME, 2002b)”
 - (iii)*The FRAME advocates the Three Rs approach...
 - (iv)*Fund for the Replacement of Animals in Medical Experiments advocates...
25. NSERC /ɛnsɪrɪk/ the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council
- (i) “NSERC supports both basic university research through discovery grants and project research through partnerships among universities, governments and the private sector, as well as the advanced training of highly qualified people.” (NSERC 2002)
 - (ii) “NSERC (the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada) is the national instrument for making strategic investments in Canada's capability in science and technology.” (*ibid.*)
 - (iii)*The NSERC supports both basic university research...
 - (iv)*Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council supports both basic...

26. SSHRC /ʃɪk/ the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council
- (i) “SSHRC is governed by a 22-member Council” (SSHRC 2003)
 - (ii) “The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) is an arms-length federal agency...” (*ibid.*)
 - (iii)*The SSHRC is governed by a 22-member Council...
 - (iv)*Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council is governed by...
27. CSIS /sisɪs/ the Canadian Security Intelligence Service
- (i) “CSIS is a government agency dedicated to protecting the national security interests of Canada” (CSIS 2001)
 - (ii) “Welcome to the Internet site of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS)” (*ibid.*)
 - (iii)*The CSIS is a government agency dedicated to....
 - (iv)*Canadian Security and Intelligence Service is a government agency...
28. CERES the California Environmental Resources Evaluation System
- (i) “CERES is an information system developed by..” (CERES 2000)
 - (ii) “Welcome to CERES, the California Environmental Resources Evaluation System” (*ibid.*)
 - (iii)*The CERES is an information system developed by...
 - (iv)*California Environmental Resources Evaluation System is an information...
29. DOGAMI the (Oregon) Department Of Geology And Mineral Industries
- (i) “DOGAMI is also a member of the research team that is currently investigating the Portland Hills Fault.” (Roddey, 2003)
 - (ii) “The next Governing Board Meeting of the Oregon Department of Geology and Mineral Industries will be held in Portland...” (*ibid.*)
 - (iii)*The DOGAMI is also a member of the research team...
 - (iv)*Department of Geology and Mineral Industries is also a member of...
30. NEMO the North East Map Organization
- (i) “NEMO’s principal region is CT, DE, ME, MA, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT.” (Bertuca, 2000)
 - (ii) “NEMO: The North East Map Organization” (*ibid.*)
 - (iii)*The NEMO’s principal region is...
 - (iv)*North East Map Association’s principal region is...
31. AMRIID the Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases
- (i) “Specifically, we determined whether AMRIID complied with the DoD Year 2000 Management Plan.” (AMRIID 1998)
 - (ii) “The overall audit objective was to determine whether the Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases (AMRIID) was adequately preparing its information technology systems to resolve date-processing issues regarding the Y2K computing problem.” (*ibid.*)
 - (iii)*...we determined whether the AMRIID complied with...

- (iv)*...we determined whether Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious complied with...
32. SETI the Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence
- (i) “As the perception grew that SETI had a reasonable prospect for success...” (SETI Institute, 2003)
 - (ii) “SETI, the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence, is an exploratory science that seeks evidence of life in the universe by looking for some signature of its technology?” (*ibid.*)
 - (iii)*As the perception grew that the SETI had a reasonable prospect...
 - (iv)*...that Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence had a reasonable...
33. FOSE the Federal Office Systems Exposition
- (i) “FOSE is the largest information technology exposition serving the government marketplace.” (a2z Inc., 2002)
 - (ii) “The Federal Office Systems Exposition (FOSE) is the most comprehensive technology event serving the government market.” (Intel, 2002)
 - (iii)*The FOSE is the largest information technology...
 - (iv)*Federal Office Systems Exposition is the largest....
34. NIMH the National Institute of Mental Health
- (i) “The mission of NIMH is to reduce the burden of mental illness and behavioral disorders through research on mind, brain, and behavior.” (Insel, 2002)
 - (ii) “The mission of the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) is to diminish the burden of mental illness through research.” (NIMH, 1999)
 - (iii)*The NIMH sponsors...
 - (iv)*National Institute of Mental Health sponsors...
35. SEPTA the South Eastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority
- (i) “SEPTA is proud to be the provider of these services...” (Moore, 2003)
 - (ii) “The South Eastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority, whose R3 trains regularly haul students from the base of campus into Philadelphia, has recently increased its fares.” (Petel, 2001)
 - (iii)*The SEPTA is proud to be...
 - (iv)*South Eastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority is proud to be...

The next thirty examples are abbreviations: pronounced letter-by-letter, their phrasal status is the same as that of the definite description from which they were derived.

Abbreviation Source phrase

36. NSF the National Science Foundation

- (i) “Find out more about the NSF, from 1950 to the present.” (NSF 2003b)

- (ii) “By the National Science Foundation Act of 1950 the Congress established the National Science Foundation to promote the progress of science; to advance the national health, prosperity, and welfare; to secure the national defense; and for other purposes.” (NSF 2003b)
 - (iii)*Find out more about NSF, from..
 - (iv)*Find out more about National Science Foundation...
37. FBI the Federal Bureau of Investigation
- (i) “In addition, to making potential targets of intelligence and terrorist activities less vulnerable through awareness, the FBI has unique response capability to act when these activities are identified.” (FBI, 2003a)
 - (ii) “Public confusion between Bureau of Investigation Special Agents and Prohibition Agents led to a permanent name change in 1935 for the agency composed of Department of Justice's investigators: the Federal Bureau of Investigation was thus born.” (FBI, 2003b)
 - (iii)*FBI has unique response capability to act
 - (iv)*Federal Bureau of Investigation has unique...
38. CIA the Central Intelligence Agency
- (i) “To accomplish its mission, the CIA engages in research, development, and deployment of high-leverage technology for intelligence purposes.” (CIA, 2003)
 - (ii) “The Central Intelligence Agency was created in 1947 with the signing of the National Security Act by President Truman.” (*ibid.*)
 - (iii)*CIA engages in research...
 - (iv)*Central Intelligence Agency engages in research...
39. NHL the National Hockey League
- (i) “At its inception, the NHL boasted five franchises...” (Davidson and Steinbreder, 1997)
 - (ii) “But after the war, the hockey powers that be decided to start a whole new organization that would be known as the National Hockey League (NHL).” (*ibid.*)
 - (iii) *NHL boasted five franchises...
 - (iv) *National Hockey League boasted five franchises...
40. NFL the National Football League
- (i) “For the first time, all of the franchises considered to be part of the NFL fielded teams.” (NFL, 2002)
 - (ii) “The American Professional Football Association changed its name to the National Football League, June 24.” (*ibid.*)
 - (iii) *...considered to be part of NFL...
 - (iv) *...considered to be part of National Football League

41. NCAA the National Collegiate Athletic Association
- (i) “By 1919, there were 170 institutions in the NCAA, and the Association was directly involved in 11 sports.” (Hawes, 1999)
 - (ii) “By 1909, the Association had 67 member institutions, and in 1910, it renamed itself the National Collegiate Athletic Association to reflect its now truly national nature.” (*ibid.*)
 - (iii)*...there were 170 institutions in NCAA...
 - (iv)*...there were 170 institutions in National Collegiate Athletic Association.
42. LSA the Linguistic Society of America
- (i) “The LSA accepts listings from academic institutions under censure by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP).” (LSA, 2003)
 - (ii) “THE LINGUISTIC SOCIETY OF AMERICA was founded in 1924 for the advancement of the scientific study of language.” (LSA, 1998)
 - (iii)*LSA accepts listings from...
 - (iv)*Linguistic Society of America accepts listings from...
43. MLA the Modern Language Association
- (i) “Over 70 members are involved in selecting the winners of the 18 prizes the MLA awards for outstanding scholarly books and articles on language and literature.” (MLA, 2001)
 - (ii) “Founded in 1883, the Modern Language Association of America provides opportunities for its members to share their scholarly findings and teaching experiences with colleagues and to discuss trends in the academy.” (*ibid.*)
 - (iii) *...the 18 prizes MLA awards...
 - (iv) *...the 18 prizes Modern Language Association awards...
44. USSR the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
- (i) “Still, the U.S.S.R. was America's foreign-policy obsession for more than 40 years.” (Jenkins, 1998)
 - (ii) “The 47-year-old Siberian oil field worker took the first flight he could to Moscow, slept Saturday night at a railway station and emerged the next day to put his life on the line to reestablish the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and be rid of President Boris Yeltsin.” (Hockstader, 1993)
 - (iii)*Still, USSR was America’s foreign-policy obsession...
 - (iv)*Still, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was America’s foreign-policy...
45. WTO the World Trade Organization
- (i) “Virtually all decisions in the WTO are taken by consensus among all member countries and they are ratified by members' parliaments.” (WTO, 1999)
 - (ii) “The World Trade Organization (WTO) is the only international organization dealing with the global rules of trade between nations.” (*ibid.*)

- (iii)*...all decisions in WTO
 - (iv)*...all decisions in World Trade Organization
46. AMA the American Medical Association
- (i) “The common sense reforms the AMA supports are not part of some untested theory; they work.” (AMA, 2003)
 - (ii) “Born in 1817, Nathan Smith Davis founded the American Medical Association when he was just thirty years old.” (Podraza, 2003)
 - (iii)*The common sense reforms AMA supports...
 - (iv)*The common sense reforms American Medical Association supports..
47. CSPCA the Canadian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
- (i) “During the early years, the primary concern of the CSPCA was improving the treatment of work horses.” (SPCA, 2003)
 - (ii) “The Canadian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (CSPCA) was the first humane society in Canada, founded in Montreal in 1869 by a group of prominent citizens.” (*ibid.*)
 - (iii)*..the primary concern of CSPCA...
 - (iv)*...the primary concern of Canadian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals...
48. RCMP the Royal Canadian Mounted Police
- (i) “The RCMP is unique in the world since it is a national, federal, provincial and municipal policing body.” (RCMP, 2003)
 - (ii) “The Royal Canadian Mounted Police is the Canadian national police service and an agency of the Ministry of the Solicitor General of Canada.” (*ibid.*)
 - (iii)*RCMP is unique in the world...
 - (iv)*Royal Canadian Mounted Police is unique in the world...
49. NRA the National Rifle Association
- (i) “After being granted a charter by the state of New York on November 17, 1871, the NRA was founded.” (NRAmembership.org, 2002)
 - (ii) “Dismayed by the lack of marksmanship shown by their troops, Union veterans Col. William C. Church and Gen. George Wingate formed the National Rifle Association in 1871.” (*ibid.*)
 - (iii)*...NRA was founded.
 - (iv)*...National Rifle Association was founded.
50. ACLU the American Civil Liberties Union
- (i) “In 1920, when the ACLU was founded by Roger Baldwin, Crystal Eastman, Albert DeSilver and others, civil liberties were in a sorry state.” (ACLU, 1999)
 - (ii) “The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) is our nation's guardian of liberty, working daily in courts, legislatures and communities to defend and preserve the individual rights and liberties guaranteed to all

people in this country by the Constitution and laws of the United States” (*ibid.*)

(iii)*In 1920, when ACLU was founded...

(iv)*In 1920, when American Civil Liberties Union was founded...

51. BLM the Bureau of Land Management

(i) “The BLM sustains the health, diversity, and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.” (US Bureau of Land Management, 2003)

(ii) “The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), an agency within the U.S. Department of the Interior, administers 261 million acres of America's public lands, located primarily in 12 Western States” (*ibid.*)

(iii)*BLM sustains the health, diversity...

(iv)*Bureau of Land Management sustains the health...

52. NIH the National Institute of Health

(i) “An agency of the Department of Health and Human Services, the NIH is the Federal focal point for health research.” (NIH, 2002)

(ii) “Begun as a one-room Laboratory of Hygiene in 1887, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) today is one of the world's foremost medical research centers.” (*ibid.*)

(iii)*...NIH is the Federal focal point for health research

(iv)*...National Institutes of Health is the Federal focal point for health research...

53. NYPD The New York Police Department

(i) “We think the NYPD is the greatest police department in America, and one of the finest law enforcement agencies in the world.” (Esposito, 2000)

(ii) “The Mission of the New York City Police Department is to enhance the quality of life in our City by working in partnership with the community and in accordance with constitutional rights to enforce the laws, preserve the peace, reduce fear, and provide for a safe environment.” (NYPD, 2003)

(iii) *We think NYPD is the...”

(iv) *We think New York Police Department is the...”

54. USA the United States of America

(i) “This time you continue to catch Carmen Sandiego and her american gang in the U.S.A.” (POMAH, 2003)

(ii) “Joint Statement Between the United States of America and the Republic of the Philippines” (Fleischer, 2003)

(iii)*...in U.S.A.

(iv)*...in United States of America.

55. DOD the Department of Defense
- (i) “To get started searching for opportunities to sell to the DoD, use our Quick Search, or go to Advanced Search for more options.” (DoDBusOpps.com, 2003)
 - (ii) “The Department of Defense has a budget of three hundred seventy-one billion dollars and more than two million employees” (DefenseLINK, 2002)
 - (iii)*...opportunities to sell to DoD,...
 - (iv)*...opportunities to sell to Department of Defense,...
56. SEC the Securities and Exchange Commission
- (i) “The SEC also oversees other key participants in the securities world, including stock exchanges, broker-dealers, investment advisors, mutual funds, and public utility holding companies.”
 - (ii) “The primary mission of the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) is to protect investors and maintain the integrity of the securities markets.” (*ibid.*)
57. NYSE the New York Stock Exchange
- (i) “Restoring investor confidence continues to be of paramount importance to the NYSE.” (Grasso, 2003)
 - (ii) “The New York Stock Exchange traces its origins back more than 200 years, to the signing of the Buttonwood Agreement by 24 New York City stockbrokers and merchants in 1792.” (NYSE, 2003)
 - (iii)*...of paramount importance to NYSE.
 - (iv)*...of paramount importance to New York Stock Exchange.
58. DNC the Democratic National Committee
- (i) The DNC is the oldest continuing party committee in the United States and the world. (DNC, 1995)
 - (ii) The Democratic National Convention established the Democratic National Committee (DNC) in 1848. (*ibid.*)
 - (iii)*DNC is the oldest continuing party committee...
 - (iv)*Democratic National Committee is the oldest...
59. GOP the Grand Old Party
- (i) “For over one hundred years, the Republican Party has been called the GOP.” (RNC, 2003a)
 - (ii) “In line with moves in the '70s to modernize the party, Republican leaders took to referring to the "grand old party," harkening back to a 1971 speech by President Nixon at the dedication of the Eisenhower Republican Center in Washington, D.C.” (RNC, 2003b)
 - (iii)*...has been called GOP.
 - (iv)*...has been called grand old party.

60. IRA the Irish Republican Army
- (i) “What happened with the collapse of the civil rights campaign and with the collapse, virtually, of the government inside Northern Ireland, was that the IRA came into its own.” (Arthur, 1998)
 - (ii) “It was the burnings in Belfast in August of '69, I'm convinced, which led to the resurrection of the Irish Republican Army.” (*ibid.*)
 - (iii)*What happened...was that IRA came into its own.
 - (iv)*What happened...was that Irish Republican Army came into its own.
61. PLO the Palestine Liberation Organization
- (i) “On 9 September 1993, in letters to Israeli Prime Minister Rabin and Norwegian Foreign Minister Holst, PLO Chairman Arafat committed the PLO to cease all violence and terrorism.” (US Dept. of State, 1997)
 - (ii) “The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) has been the embodiment of the Palestinian national movement.” (Permanent Observer, 1999)
 - (iii) *...Arafat committed PLO to cease all violence and terrorism.
 - (iv)*...Arafat committed Palestine Liberation Organization to cease...
62. PUK the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
- (i) “The PUK has moved part of its interior ministry from the autonomous zone to Kirkuk and has taken over the city's only television station, all with at least tacit U.S. permission.” (Wilson, 2003)
 - (ii) “For help, U.S. officers have turned to eager leaders from the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), who have administered sectors of a largely autonomous U.S.-protected portion of northern Iraq since shortly after the 1991 Persian Gulf War.” (*ibid.*)
 - (iii) *PUK has moved part of its interior ministry...
 - (iv) *Patriotic Union of Kurdistan has moved part of its...
63. FAA the Federal Aviation Administration
- (i) “The FAA operates the world's biggest and safest aviation system.” (FAA, 2003).
 - (ii) “Consider a career with the Federal Aviation Administration.” (*ibid.*)
 - (iii)*FAA operates the world's...
 - (iv)*Federal Aviation Administration operates the worlds...
64. UNFCCC the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
- (i) “However, if you should require them for other purposes, you will require the written authorization of the UNFCCC.” (UNFCCC, 2003)
 - (ii) “The 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is one of a series of recent agreements through which countries around the world are banding together to meet this challenge.” (UNFCCC, 2002)
 - (iii)*the written authorization of UNFCCC.
 - (iv)*the written authorization of United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

65. MBTA the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority

- (i) “The MBTA has met increasing demand with new technologies and expanded services.”
- (ii) “On behalf of Governor Mitt Romney and Lieutenant Governor Kerry Healey, thank you for visiting the web site of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA)”
- (iii)*MBTA has met increasing demand with...
- (iv)*Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority has met...

The examples above illustrate the two independent claims made here, listed below:

Claim 1: Acronyms created from (compound) common nouns within definite descriptions are proper names (examples 5-35).

Claim 2: Abbreviations created from (compound) common nouns within definite descriptions retain their status as common nouns (examples 36-65).

In fact, claim 1 is much more strongly supported than claim 2; there are very few, if any, exceptions to it. The only potential exceptions found during research for this article are *ENIAC* (the Electronic Numeral Integrator And Computer), the first computer, *CINDI* (the Center for Integration of Natural Disaster Information) and *TIGRIS* (the Topologically Integrated Geographic and Resource Information System). With two of these, which do occur as “the ENIAC” and “the TIGRIS” in some sources, the use of the acronym as a proper name is also well-established. In his article, “The ENIAC Story”, Weik (1961) goes back and forth in the use of *ENIAC* as a common noun and as a proper name, illustrated in (66) with sentences taken from successive paragraphs:

66. *ENIAC* as both a common noun and proper name in *The ENIAC Story*, Weik 1961.

- (a) “The ENIAC was placed in operation at the Moore School, component by component, beginning with the cycling unit and an accumulator in June 1944. “
- (b) “By today's standards for electronic computers the ENIAC was a grotesque monster.”
- (c) “But ENIAC was the prototype from which most other modern computers evolved.”
- (d) “ENIAC could discriminate the sign of a number, compare quantities for equality, add, subtract, multiply, divide, and extract square roots.”
- (e) “ENIAC stored a maximum of twenty 10-digit decimal numbers. Its accumulators combined the functions of an adding machine and storage

unit. No central memory unit existed, per se. Storage was localized within the functioning units of the computer.”

Weik’s variation may reflect a transition in the use of the acronym. In the initial report on ENIAC, Goldstine (1946) uses *ENIAC* mostly as a common noun, with just a few uses as a proper name (example 67) , while in a 1996 recap of the history of ENIAC, Moye (1996) uses ENIAC exclusively as a proper name (example 68).

67. “The ENIAC Operating Manual contains a complete set of instructions for operating the ENIAC. It includes very little explanatory material, and hence assumes familiarity with Part I of the Technical Description of the ENIAC. The ENIAC Maintenance Manual includes description of the various test units and procedures for testing, as well as a list of common and probable sources of trouble. It assumes a complete understanding of the circuits of ENIAC, i.e., a knowledge of both Parts I and II of the Technical Description of the ENIAC.” (Goldstine, 1946: par. 1).

68. “In fact, the scheduled movement of ENIAC to APG was delayed so that the "test" could be completed before the machine was moved.” (Moye, 1996).

The situation may be similar with the other non-proper-name acronym, *TIGRIS*, encountered during this study. Although most geographic-acronym listings use *TIGRIS* as a common noun in the following sentence, describing what it is:

69. “The TIGRIS is a geographic information system developed by Intergraph Corporation that is used to capture and analyze map features (nodes, lines, and areas).” (GeoCommunity, 1995)

in actual professional use the definite determiner seems to have been decisively dropped, as in these sentences excerpted from an article that appeared in 1993:

70. *TIGRIS* as a proper noun (Hesse and Williamson, 1993):

- (a) “Only TIGRIS allowed the easy ‘natural’ extension of the conceptual object data structure into an object-oriented programming system (OOPS).”
- (b) “The sharing of schema components, the ownership relationships in the form of owner-to-component associations and the resultant inheritance of attributes, demonstrate the object-oriented design of TIGRIS and shows a much richer modelling capability than the conventional relational data base model.”
- (c) “For a detailed discussion of extensions to the RDB standard query language (SQL) for spatial analysis in a topologically-structured GIS, within TIGRIS, see Herring et al. [1988].”

Indeed, within this article, the familiar pattern from examples (5-35) above shows up: when the acronym's source phrase is introduced, it occurs with a definite determiner:

71. "However, the Topologically Integrated Geographic Resource Information System (TIGRIS) was the first commercially available GIS entirely based on object-oriented concepts with combined spatial and non-spatial data storage and interactive topology." (Hesse and Williamson 1993).

The third case, the acronym *CINDI* for the Center for Integration of Natural Disaster Information, XXX insert discussion when response found XXX.

With respect to claim 2, however, there are several high-frequency exceptions. Interestingly, they tend to fall into a few quite semantically regular classes, presented below. Quotations are given illustrating the use of the abbreviation as a proper name and the use of its source phrase within a definite description.

72. Many university names, e.g.

- (a) UCLA the University of California, Los Angeles
 - (i) "As Chancellor of UCLA, I am very pleased to welcome you to our home on the Internet." (Carnesale, 2003)
 - (ii) "The University of California, Los Angeles--UCLA for short--is the second largest campus in enrollment in the University of California system." (Hamilton, 2002).
- (b) MIT the Massachusetts Institute of Technology
 - (i) "An Act to Incorporate the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and to Grant Aid to Said Institute and to the Boston Society of Natural History" (MIT Charter, 1999)
 - (ii) "The mission of MIT is to advance knowledge and educate students in science, technology, and other areas of scholarship that will best serve the nation and the world in the 21st century" (MIT, 2003).
- (c) UNC the University of North Carolina
 - (i) "The University of North Carolina was anticipated by a section of the first state constitution drawn up in 1776 directing the establishing of 'one or more universities' in which 'all useful learning shall be duly encouraged and promoted.'" (Powell, 2003)
 - (ii) "Now in its third century, UNC belongs to the select group of 61 American and two Canadian campuses forming the Association of American Universities." (*ibid.*)

73. Many television network names^v, e.g.

- (a) NBC the National Broadcasting Company
 - (i) "Starting off as a radio network in the 1920s, NBC evolved into a television broadcaster in the 1940s." (NBC, 2003)

- (ii) “An industry pioneer for more than 75 years, the National Broadcasting Company was founded in 1926 by General Electric, RCA, and Westinghouse.” (*ibid.*)
- (b) ABC the American Broadcasting Company
 - (i) “ABC grew out of a Federal Communications Commission (FCC) “monopoly” probe.” (Noyes, 1997)
 - (ii) “The American Broadcasting Company, more commonly referred to as ABC, has been a forerunner in the evolution of television network history.” (*ibid.*)
- (c) CBS Columbia Broadcasting System
 - (i) “Unfortunately, as soon as some of them gained fame at CBS they were lured away by the far richer and more popular NBC.” (Auster, 1997)
 - (ii) “Paley, who had become enamored of radio as a result of advertising the family's La Palina brand cigars over a local station, bought the fledgling network, then consisting of 22 affiliates and 16 employees, for \$400,000 on 18 January 1929, and renamed it the Columbia Broadcasting System.” (*ibid.*)
- (d) CNN the Cable News Network
 - (i) “The Cable News Network (CNN) ranks as one of the most important, indeed perhaps the most important, innovation in cable television during the final quarter of the 20th century.” (Gomery, 1997)
 - (ii) “Whatever the news mix, CNN's prestige never stopped rising.” (*ibid.*)

Why do these particular categories of abbreviations seem to lose their definite determiners, when nearly all the other abbreviations of definite descriptions do not? It could just be coincidence—but a better explanation is available. Both of these groups of exceptions are part of a principled, though restricted, category of English nouns which behave, in certain contexts, like full noun phrases; Stvan 1998:5 calls them “bare location nominals”. Some examples include *school*, *camp*, and *church*.^{vi} Such bare nominals behave, syntactically, like NPs, in that they can occur by themselves, without determiners or plural marking: *School was fun today; I want to go to camp*.

Interestingly, such ‘bare location NPs’ tend to belong to one of three or four well-defined semantic classes, given below as presented in Stvan 1998:

74. Categories of bare singular nominals

- (a) Social or geographical institutions (at school, in camp, on shore)
- (b) Media (on film, in shot)
- (c) Temporal Interruption Events (at lunch, on break)
- (d) “Untethered metaphors” (on target)

Crucially for claim 2, both *university* and *television* are among these nouns in American English—*university* as part of class 74(a), (“I go to university”) and *television*, presumably, as part of class 74(b) (“I saw it on television”). Although, for these abbreviations, the source phrases are not legitimate instances of bare location nominals, it seems likely that the lack of definite determiner with the abbreviated form is possible because the abbreviations refer to institutional entities which belong to the appropriate categories. See Stvan 1998 for further discussion of the syntax, semantics and pragmatics of bare nominals of this type.

There are, however, a few other exceptions to Claim 2 that are less amenable to reanalysis as a bare location nominal. The following three abbreviations all require determiners in their source phrases, but are usually used without determiners when abbreviated by the relevant organizations. However, even though the determinerless form is the institutional convention for these, the abbreviation does sometimes crop up with a determiner, as illustrated in the following examples. Examples of the determinerless use, the source phrase with determiner, and use with the determiner are given in (75) below:

75. Exceptions to Claim 2

- (a) USPS the United States Postal Service
 - (i) Whether bone marrow drives or efforts to recover missing children, USPS gets involved – in your community and nationwide. (USPS 2003)
 - (ii) When inaccurate, misleading or false information about the United States Postal Service appears in print and televised stories, we’ll respond. (*ibid.*)
 - (iii) Postal Customer Councils strengthen the working relationship between the USPS and its customers. (*ibid.*)
- (b) WHO the World Health Organization
 - (i) “WHO will also be working to quickly raise an additional US\$ 100 million from bilateral donors to support expanded surveillance and response across the globe.” (Simpson, 2003)
 - (ii) “The World Health Organization today announces the creation of a new public-private initiative to fight SARS and build capacity for surveillance, epidemiology and public health laboratory facilities in China and the surrounding region.” (*ibid.*)
 - (iii) “The objective of the WHO is the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health.” (Health Canada 2002).
- (c) NSA the National Security Agency
 - (i) “The National Security Agency is the Nation’s cryptologic organization.” (NSA, 2003)

- (ii) “A high technology organization, NSA is on the frontiers of communications and data processing.” (*ibid.*)
- (iii) “What is the NSA?” (*ibid.*)
- (d) WWF the World Wildlife Fund
 - (i) “In just over four decades, WWF (formerly known as the World Wildlife Fund) has become one of the world's largest and most respected independent conservation organizations.” (WWF, 2003)^{vii}

These are the only true exceptions to Claim 2 observed during the course of this study, although there are very likely to be more. Other abbreviations which look like they could be exceptions at first glance turn out to be cases where the source phrase is also determinerless. One reason that the source phrase could be determinerless is because the it is a modifying compound noun within a larger compound noun, in which case the source phrase is not itself an element which would take a determiner—the abbreviation doesn't contain a letter for the head noun. A few examples of abbreviations of this type are given in (76) below.

76. Determinerless abbreviations from within compound Ns:

- (a) IBM International Business Machine
 - (i) “We hope that you enjoy this unique look back at the highly textured history of the International Business Machines Corporation.” (IBM 2003a)
 - (ii) “IBM helped pioneer information technology over the years, and it stands today at the forefront of a worldwide industry that is revolutionizing the way in which enterprises, organizations and people operate and thrive.” (*ibid.*)
- (b) KFC Kentucky Fried Chicken
 - (i) “Under the new owners, Kentucky Fried Chicken Corporation grew rapidly. (KFCC, 2002).”
 - (ii) “Kentucky Fried Chicken became a subsidiary of R.J. Reynolds Industries, Inc. (now RJR Nabisco, Inc.), when Heublein Inc. was acquired by Reynolds in 1982.” (*ibid.*)
 - (iii) “KFC was acquired in October 1986 from RJR Nabisco, Inc. by PepsiCo, Inc., for approximately \$840 million.” (*ibid.*)
- (c) GE General Electric
 - (i) “In 1892, these two major companies combined to form the General Electric Company.” (GE, 2003)
 - (ii) “Several of Edison's early business offerings are in fact still part of GE today, including lighting, transportation, industrial products, power transmission and medical equipment.” (GE, 2003)

In these cases, of course, the phrases which are the source of the abbreviation are not themselves referential; rather, they occur as modifiers of a head noun which does not itself form part of the abbreviation—in a sense, they're abbreviations of clippings. There are of course acronyms of this type as well, for instance, *CRISP* (Computer Retrieval of Information on Scientific Projects), which is a database system of biomedical information whose acronym is created from a phrase which describes what the system does, rather than from a phrase which names the system. This acronym, then, is determinerless for two reasons: a) we wouldn't expect it to have one, since its referent is not the same as the referent of its source phrase, b) it's an acronym of a unique entity functioning as a proper name.

Another expected kind of determinerless abbreviation occurs when the source phrase itself is lacking a determiner because it is headed by a plural noun or a mass noun, which do not themselves require determiners, as they can act as NPs by themselves. Some examples of this type are listed in (77) below:

77. Determinerless abbreviations of determinerless source phrases

- (a) AA Alcoholics Anonymous
 - (i) Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism. (The AA Grapevine, 2003)
 - (ii) AA is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy, neither endorses nor opposes any causes. (*ibid.*)
- (b) AI Amnesty International
 - (i) "Amnesty International has more than a million members and supporters in over 140 countries and territories." (Amnesty, 2003)
 - (ii) "AI calls for the immediate and unconditional release of all prisoners of conscience." (Amnesty, 2002).

Of course, there are acronyms of this type as well: *PETA* (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) is one such; *AIDS* (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is another.

With respect to types of items which may or may not count as instances of acronyms or abbreviations simply defined, there is some interesting variation. Pronouncing an initialism based on a definite description as a word, even if some of its

components are not initials but clippings, is enough to guarantee elimination of the definite determiner, as in *UNSCOM* or *COMDEX*, illustrated below:

78. Acronym/clipping combos:

- (a) UNSCOM the United Nations Special Commission
 - (i) “It also offers a dossier, in English and Arabic, explaining the role of UNSCOM, the extent of Iraq's weapons programmes, and a chronology of events.” (UK Ministry of Defense, 2003)
 - (ii) “The United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) has destroyed more weapons than were destroyed during the whole of the Gulf War.” (*ibid.*)

- (b) COMDEX the Computer Dealers Exposition
 - (i) “The show started as the Computer Dealers Exposition (ComDeX) in 1979, drawing about 4,000 people to a single hotel ballroom in Las Vegas.” (Lewis, 2002)
 - (ii) “By then COMDEX was the most important trade show in the computing world, the focal point of the PC calendar year.” (*ibid.*)

Syntactically, then, these acronymic clippings behave like acronyms, not abbreviations.

In cases where the initialism is pronounced according to some description of the initialism itself, rather than as a simple abbreviation or acronym, there is variation. In two cases, the descriptive part is contained within an abbreviation-pronunciation. In one of these cases, the initialism behaves like an abbreviation and retains its definite determiner; in the other, it loses the determiner like an acronym:

79. Partial abbreviations containing descriptions

- (a) NAACP the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
Pronunciation: /ɛn dʌbəl eɪ si pi/ “N double-A CP”
 - (i) “The history of the NAACP is one of blood, sweat and tears.” (NAACP 2001)
 - (ii) “Since its inception the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was poised for a long, tumultuous and rewarding history.” (*ibid.*)

- (b) AAAS the American Association for the Advancement of Science
Pronunciation: /trɪpəl eɪ ɛs/ “triple-A S”
 - (i) The formation of AAAS in 1848 marked the emergence of a national scientific community in the United States. (AAAS, 2002a)
 - (ii) For 150 years, the life of the American Association for the Advancement of Science has been interwoven with the growth of American science. (AAAS, 2002b)

When the whole abbreviation is simply described, as in the abbreviation for the American Automobile Association, “triple-A”, the result seems to behave like an acronym rather than an abbreviation:

80. Entirely described abbreviation

- (a) AAA the American Automobile Association
Pronunciation: /ˈtrɪpəl eɪ/ “triple-A”
- (i) “For the last century, AAA has been active in a number of transportation issues.” (AAA, 2003)
- (ii) “Nine of those clubs met in Chicago on March 4, 1902, to create a national motoring organization, and the American Automobile Association was formed with 1,500 members -- about 44 million fewer than it represents today.” (ibid.)

To conclude, I hope to have shown that there is more regularity in the syntactic behavior of initialisms than might appear to be the case from an initial overview. When a definite description becomes an initialism, its syntactic category is predictable depending on whether the initialism is an acronym or an abbreviation. Acronyms behave like proper names and drop the definite determiner, while abbreviations continue to behave like compound Ns, and retain the determiner. Two particularly prominent classes of exceptions to the abbreviation rule were argued to be subcases of the class of bare locative nominals in English; the syntactic behavior of less clear-cut categories of initialism from definite descriptions was also discussed.

Endnotes:

ⁱ Cannon actually reports a figure of 16% for abbreviations when explicitly comparing the two groups on p. 116, but the raw figures he gives (63 proper names of 461 nominal abbreviations) indicate that 13 per cent is closer to correct.

ⁱⁱ In more recent terminology, following Abney (1987), these would be referred to as Determiner Phrases (DPs). The distinction is not directly relevant here, so I follow the older and more familiar terminology.

ⁱⁱⁱ We are not here considering the categorial status of initialisms of NPs which are *not* definite descriptions, such as “SUV” (‘*a* Sport Utility Vehicle’), “PC” (‘*a* Personal Computer’), or “POW” (‘*a* Prisoner Of War’). A casual glance suggests that they tend to retain their categorial status when they abbreviations, and behave more variably when acronyms, but obviously in these matters a casual glance won’t tell us much.

^{iv} This is of course grammatical because *code* is a mass noun. However, if the acronym ASCII were behaving like a mass noun, it should accept the definite determiner, just as *code* does (*the code* is grammatical). *The ASCII*, however, is infelicitous.

^v Interestingly, both the British Broadcasting Corporation (*the BBC*) nor the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (*the CBC*) behave like regular abbreviations in this respect: they tend to require the definite determiner, although the latter is in flux—in Canadian English, both “CBC” and “the CBC” are common.

^{vi} There is some dialectal variation in this regard: in British English, *hospital* is also a bare location nominal (“She went to hospital”), though not in American English.

^{vii} WWF has this to say about its name:

“What does WWF stand for? WWF originally stood for "World Wildlife Fund". However, in 1986, WWF had come to realize that its name no longer reflected the scope of its activities. WWF changed its name from World Wildlife Fund to the "World Wide Fund For Nature". The United States and Canada, however, retained the old name.

The resulting confusion caused by the name change in 1986, together with its translation into more than 15 languages, led the WWF Network in 2001 to agree on using the original acronym as its one, global name - the acronym that it had always been known by since its inception way back in 1961: "WWF".”
(WWF, 2003b)