

WHY IS IT *THE* CIA BUT NOT **THE* NASA? ACRONYMS, INITIALISMS, AND DEFINITE DESCRIPTIONS

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ABSTRACT: Using 61 acronyms and initialisms culled from Web sites in May 2003, this study shows that the syntactic behavior of abbreviations from phrases is regular. When a definite description is abbreviated, its syntactic category is predictable, depending on whether the result is an acronym (*ERIC*, *NAFTA*) or an initialism (*FBI*, *NSF*). Acronyms behave like proper names and drop the definite determiner: “ERIC produces a variety of publications...” Initialisms continue to behave like common compound nouns and retain the determiner: “... the FBI has unique response capabilities...” Two frequent exceptions, university names (*UCLA*) and television networks (*NBC*), are shown to act like bare locative nominals in English (*go to school*). Other apparent exceptions (*GE*, *AA*) are also shown to exhibit regularity.

IT HAS LONG BEEN NOTED that there are significant differences in the behavior of the two main classes of English abbreviations formed from the first letter of each word in the original phrase: ACRONYMS, where the sequence of initials taken from the source is pronounced as a phonological word, and INITIALISMS, where each letter in the initialism is pronounced individually.¹ A typical example of the former is the disease *AIDS* (/ejdz/), Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, while a typical example of the latter is *DOA* (/dijowej/), Dead On Arrival. For a comprehensive overview of the patterns exhibited by acronyms and initialisms in English, see Cannon (1989). This paper explores the generality of one tendency noted by Cannon, the fact that acronyms are more likely than initialisms to be proper nouns: 54% of acronyms in Cannon’s corpus were proper nouns (112), compared to only 13% of initialisms (109).²

Scholars have long been interested in the various conditions which are involved in determining when an abbreviation becomes an acronym and when it remains an initialism; phonotactic plausibility and length of abbreviation were identified early on as important factors (Baum 1955). When an abbreviation becomes an acronym, McCully and Holmes (1988) showed that there are quite general processes which govern the way it is pronounced. Here, I

investigate the syntactic consequences of this process. What determines the categorial status of an abbreviation? In particular, the focus is on abbreviations which are derived from source phrases which are definite descriptions. There seems to be a fairly general process determining the categorial status of abbreviations which distinguishes acronyms from initialisms.

Acronyms and initialisms 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% of initialisms and 98% 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 initialisms 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*).³ 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 (NP),⁴ 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 abbreviations in question themselves function as noun phrases, that is, they function as proper names. While this is true in some cases, like those illustrated in (1) and (2), it does not account for cases like that in (3), where the source phrase is a compound contained within a definite description.⁵

Quotations are given for each abbreviation to illustrate its use. In the quotations in (1) and (2), where the source of the abbreviation is itself an NP, replacing the abbreviation with its source phrase results in a grammatical English sentence. In the quotation in (3), however, directly replacing the acronym with its source phrase 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. AOL, America Online

AOL becomes the first online service to release a Windows version of its software. [AOL, "Corporate Information: Timeline," Nov. 13, 2002, http://www.aoltimewarner.com/corporate_information/timeline.adp]⁶

(Cf. America Online becomes the first online service...)

2. PETA, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals

PETA filed a defamation suit last December against O'Donnell... [Josh Grossberg, "Rosie Makes Nice with PETA." *E!Online*, Mar. 23, 2001, <http://www.eonline.com/News/Items/o,1,8009,00.html?newsft>]

(Cf. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals filed a defamation...)

3. NATO, North Atlantic Treaty Organization
 What can NATO do to help to stabilize the situation in Afghanistan? [George Islay MacNeill Robertson, "Press Conference," NATO, May 13, 2003, <http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2003/so30513a.htm>]
 (Cf. *What can North Atlantic Treaty Organization do to help...?)

If the difference in the percentage of acronyms and initialisms which function as proper names were due to a difference in the category of their source phrases, acronyms would 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 initialisms. Except for a few classes of exceptions which we will consider below, initialisms tend to retain the categorial status of their source phrase: if the source phrase is an NP, the initialism is also an NP; if the source phrase is an N, the initialism is also an N. That is, if an organizational name which requires a definite determiner is abbreviated, the initialism generally also requires a definite determiner. A typical example of an initialism of a compound within a definite description is given in (4); a quotation illustrating its syntactic status as an N is given, as well as a sentence illustrating its ungrammaticality as an NP:

4. the CIA, the Central Intelligence Agency
 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, "Director of Terrorist Threat Integration Center Appointed," Mar. 11, 2003, http://www.cia.gov/cia/public_affairs/press_release/2003/prog112003.html]
 (Cf. *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. Although initialisms of definite descriptions generally do not become names, there is more flexibility with initialisms, and sometimes they do become names.

It is often noted that initialisms 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, Ronneberger-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 initialisms):

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 initialisms to be more “phrasal” than acronyms, which are more “lexical,” but that this tendency is gradient: acronyms can be phrasal, and initialisms can be lexical. What I show here is that, when the source phrase is a definite description, the syntactic properties of the abbreviation are determined largely by whether it is an acronym or an initialism, independent of the degree of semantic lexicalization (“idiomatization”) that has occurred. Certainly it is the case that commonly used initialisms can lose their connection to their source phrase: the use of *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 initialism, 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*).

Thirty-one examples of acronyms whose source phrases are compound Ns within definite descriptions are presented in table 1. Example sentences illustrating their determiner-less use are provided in appendix A, taken primarily from the relevant organizations’ Web 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 table 2, 30 examples of initialisms whose source phrases are compound Ns within definite descriptions are listed. Example sentences illustrating their use with determiners and grammaticality judgments showing that both the initialism and the source phrase are ungrammatical without the determiner are provided in appendix B.⁷

CLAIM 1: Acronyms created from (compound) common nouns within definite descriptions are proper names (table 1).

CLAIM 2: Initialisms created from (compound) common nouns within definite descriptions retain their status as common nouns (table 2).

Claim 1 is much more strongly supported than claim 2; there are very few, if any, exceptions to it. The only potential exceptions are *ENIAC* (the

TABLE 1
Examples of Acronyms with Compound Noun Source Phrases

ALEC	the American Legislative Exchange Council
AMRIID	the Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases
APSA	the American Political Science Association
ARCA	the Automobile Racing Club of America
ASCII	the American Standard Code for Information Interchange
ASLEF	the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen
ASMI	the American Sports Medicine Institute
CEPPO	the Chemical Emergency Preparedness and Prevention Office
CERES	the California Environmental Resources Evaluation System
CITES	the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species
COBRA	the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act
CSIS /sɪsɪs/	the Canadian Security Intelligence Service
DOGAMI	the (Oregon) Department Of Geology And Mineral Industries
ERIC	the Educational Resources Information Center
FASAB	the Federal Accounting Standards Advisory Board
FOSE	the Federal Office Systems Exposition
FRAME	the Fund for the Replacement of Animals in Medical Experiments
NAFTA	the North American Free Trade Agreement
NASA	the National Aeronautics and Space Administration
NEMO	the North East Map Organization
NIAID	the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases
NIMH	the National Institute of Mental Health
NSERC /ɛnsɪrɪk/	the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council
OPEC	the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
RADA	the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art
SEPTA	the South Eastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority
SETI	the Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence
SSHRC /ʃɪɪk/	the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council
UNESCO	the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
WCCFL /wɪkfəl/	the West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics

TABLE 2
Examples of Initialisms with Compound Noun Source Phrases

ACLU	the American Civil Liberties Union
AMA	the American Medical Association
BLM	the Bureau of Land Management
CIA	the Central Intelligence Agency
CSPCA	the Canadian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
DNC	the Democratic National Committee
DOD	the Department of Defense
FAA	the Federal Aviation Administration
FBI	the Federal Bureau of Investigation
GOP	the Grand Old Party
IRA	the Irish Republican Army
LSA	the Linguistic Society of America
MBTA	the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority
MLA	the Modern Language Association
NCAA	the National Collegiate Athletic Association
NFL	the National Football League
NHL	the National Hockey League
NIH	the National Institute of Health
NRA	the National Rifle Association
NSF	the National Science Foundation
NYPD	the New York Police Department
NYSE	the New York Stock Exchange
PLO	the Palestine Liberation Organization
PUK	the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
RCMP	the Royal Canadian Mounted Police
SEC	the Securities and Exchange Commission
UNFCCC	the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
USA	the United States of America
USSR	the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WTO	the World Trade Organization

Electronic Numeral Integrator And Computer), the first computer, *CINDI* (the Center for Integration of Natural Disaster Information), and *TIGRIS* (the Topologically Integrated Geographic Resource Information System). For two of these three, 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. Martin H. Weik goes back and forth in the use of *ENIAC* as a common noun and as a proper name, illustrated in (5) with sentences taken from successive paragraphs ("The ENIAC Story," *Ordinance*, Jan.–Feb. 1961; available at <http://ftp.arl.mil/~mike/comphist/eniac-story.html>):

5. 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, Adele Goldstine uses *ENIAC* mostly as a common noun, with just a few uses as a proper name (6), while in a 1996 recap of the history of ENIAC, William T. Moye uses ENIAC exclusively as a proper name (7).⁸

6. 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 [*sic*] 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. ["A Report on the ENIAC (Electronic Numerical Integrator and Computer)," June 1, 1946; available at <http://ftp.arl.army.mil/~mike/comphist/46eniac-report/>]
7. In fact, the scheduled movement of ENIAC to APG was delayed so that the "test" could be completed before the machine was moved. ["ENIAC: The Army-Sponsored Revolution," Jan. 1996; available at <http://ftp.arl.army.mil/~mike/comphist/96summary/>]

The situation may be similar with *TIGRIS*, although most geographic-acronym lists use *TIGRIS* as a common noun in the following sentence, describing what it is:

8. 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, "Earth Imaging Glossary: T," 1995, <http://imaging.geocomm.com/glossary/t.html>]

In actual professional use the definite determiner seems to have been decisively dropped, as in these sentences excerpted from Walter Hesse and Ian P. Williamson ("The Authoritative Topographic-Cartographic Information System (ATKIS)," *Australian Surveyor* 38.3: 190–96):

- g. 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...

Indeed, within this article, the familiar pattern from table 1 above shows up: when the acronym's source phrase is introduced, it occurs with a definite determiner:

10. 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.

The third potential exception to claim 1, the acronym *CINDI* for the Center for Integration of Natural Disaster Information, seems to be a genuine exception, although I was unable to get any information about the way this acronym is generally used in speech. Diane Brittle of the United States Geographical Survey was emphatic that "the CINDI" has been accepted by the USGS technical editors and is the version determined to be correct by the USGS.... The USGS always referred to it in writing as 'the CINDI'" (pers. comm., May 27, 2003). However, she would not comment upon whether these usage guidelines are followed by USGS staff in speech as well as in writing; certainly their Web site uses *the CINDI* consistently. In any case, the center was an experimental one and since has been defunded, so the need to refer to it at all has presumably diminished significantly.

Claim 2, however, has 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 initialism as a proper name and the use of its source phrase within a definite description.

11. University Names

- 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. [Albert Carnesale, "Welcome," UCLA, 2003, <http://www.UCLA.edu/welcome.html>]
 - ii. The University of California, Los Angeles—UCLA for short—is the second largest campus in enrollment in the University of California system. [Andrew Hamilton, "Los Angeles: Historical Overview," University of California History Digital Archives, Aug. 8, 2002, http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/uchistory/general_history/campuses/ucla/overview.html]
- 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 Libraries: Archives and Special Collections, "Charter of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology," May 1999, <http://libraries.mit.edu/archives/mithistory/charter.html>]
 - 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, "MIT Facts 2003: Mission and Origins," 2003, <http://web.mit.edu/facts/mission.html>]
- 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." [William S. Powell, "Carolina: A Brief History," UNC, 2003, <http://www.unc.edu/about/history.html>]
 - 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.]

12. Television Networks⁹

- 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, "Corporate Info: This Is NBC," 2003, http://www.nbc.com/nbc/header/Corporate_Info.shtml]
 - 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. [Gayle Noyes, "American Broadcasting Company,"

- in *The Encyclopedia of Television*, ed. Horace Newcomb (Chicago: Dearborn, 1997); available at <http://www.museum.tv/archives/etv/A/htmlA/americanbroa/americanbroa.htm>]
- 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. [Albert Auster, "Columbia Broadcasting System," in *The Encyclopedia of Television*, ed. Horace Newcomb (Chicago: Dearborn, 1997); available at <http://www.museum.tv/archives/etv/C/htmlC/columbiabroa/columbiabroa.htm>]
 - 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. [Douglas Gomery, "Cable News Network," in *The Encyclopedia of Television*, ed. Horace Newcomb (Chicago: Dearborn, 1997); available at <http://www.Museum.TV/archives/etv/C/htmlC/cablenewsne/cablenewsne.htm>]
 - ii. Whatever the news mix, CNN's prestige never stopped rising. [Ibid.]

Why do these particular categories of initialisms seem to lose their definite determiners, when nearly all the other initialisms 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*.¹⁰ 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):

- 13. 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 *college* and *television* are among these nouns in American English—*college* as part of class (a) (*I go to college*) and *television* as part of class (b) (*I saw it on television*). Although the source phrases in (11) and (12) are not legitimate instances of bare location nominals, it seems likely that the lack of definite determiner is possible because the initialisms 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.

A few other exceptions to claim 2 are less amenable to reanalysis as bare location nominals. The three initialisms in (14) 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 initialism 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 (14) below:

- 14. 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, "Serving the Community," 2003, http://www.usps.com/common/category/community_involve.htm]
 - 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. [Iain Simpson, "World Health Organization Announces New Public-Private Initiative on Disease Surveillance and Response," May 22, 2003, WHO, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/releases/2003/prwha3/en/>]
 - 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, "WHO—World Health Organization," Apr. 15, 2002, http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hpfb-dgpsa/inspectorate/who_e.html]
- c. NSA, the National Security Agency
 - i. The National Security Agency is the Nation's cryptologic organization. [NSA, "About the National Security Agency," 2003, http://www.nsa.gov/about_nsa/index.html]
 - 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

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, "A History of WWF," http://www.panda.org/about_wwf/who_we_are/history/index.cfm]¹¹

The initialisms in (14) are the only true exceptions to claim 2 observed during the course of this study, although there are very likely more. Other initialisms which look as if 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 that 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 initialism contains letters from the modifier but not one for the head noun. A few examples of abbreviations of this type are given in (15) below.

- 15. Determinerless Initialisms from within Compound Ns
 - a. IBM, International Business Machines
 - i. We hope that you enjoy this unique look back at the highly textured history of the International Business Machines Corporation. [IBM, "History of IBM," 2003, http://www-1.ibm.com/ibm/history/history/history_intro.html]
 - 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. [KFC Corp., "About KFC: Colonel Harland Sanders," 2002, <http://www.kfc.com/about/colonel.htm>]
 - 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, "A History of GE," 2003, http://www.ge.com/en/company/companyinfo/at_a_glance/history_story.htm]
 - 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. [Ibid.]

The phrases which are the source of these initialisms are not referential; rather, they occur as modifiers of a head noun which does not itself form part of the initialism—in a sense, they are initialisms of clipped compounds.¹² 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: (1) its referent is not the same as the referent of its source phrase and (2) it is an acronym of a unique entity functioning as a proper name.

Another kind of determinerless initialism consistent with claim 2 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 (16) below:

- 16. Determinerless initialisms 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 A.A. Grapevine, "About A.A.," Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 2003, http://www.aa.org/default/en_about.cfm]
 - 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 International, "About Amnesty International," 2003, http://web.amnesty.org/pages/aboutai_index]
 - ii. AI calls for the immediate and unconditional release of all prisoners of conscience. [Amnesty International, "Amnesty International

Report 2002: AI's Appeals for Action," 2002, <http://web.amnesty.org/web/ar2002.nsf/aiappeals/aiappeals?OpenDocument>]

Of course, there are acronyms headed by a plural noun or a mass noun 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 initialisms simply defined, there is some interesting variation. Pronouncing an abbreviation 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:

17. 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, "Britain, UNSCOM and Iraq," 2003, <http://special.fco.gov.uk/>]
 - 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. [Peter Lewis, "The Rise and Fall of COMDEX," *Fortune*, Nov. 19, 2002, <http://www.fortune.com/fortune/ontech/o,15918,393917,00.html>]
 - 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 initialisms.

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

18. Partial Initialisms Containing Descriptions

- a. NAACP, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People; pronunciation: /ɛn dʌbəl ej sɪj piː/ "N double-A CP"

- i. The history of the NAACP is one of blood, sweat and tears. [NAACP, "Our Past and Your Future," 2001, http://www.naacp.org/past_future/index.html]
- 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 s/ "triple-A S"
 - i. The formation of AAAS in 1848 marked the emergence of a national scientific community in the United States. [AAAS, "Origins: 1848–1899," 2002, <http://archives.aaas.org/exhibit/origins.php>]
 - 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, "150 Years of Advancing Sciences: A History of AAAS," 2002, <http://archives.aaas.org/exhibit/>]

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

- 19. Entirely described initialism

AAA, the American Automobile Association; pronunciation: /trɪpəl eɪ/ "triple-A"

 - a. For the last century, AAA has been active in a number of transportation issues. [AAA, "A History of Public Service," 2003, <http://www.aaanewsroom.net/Main.asp?SectionID=&SubCategoryID=27&CategoryID=10>]
 - b. 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.]

In summary, the syntactic behavior of abbreviations is regular. When a definite description is abbreviated, its syntactic category is predictable depending on whether the abbreviation is an acronym or an initialism. Acronyms behave like proper names and drop the definite determiner, while initialisms continue to behave like common nouns and retain the determiner. Two particularly prominent classes of exceptions to the initialism rule can be explained as subcases of the class of bare locative nominals in English. The syntactic behavior of less clear-cut categories of abbreviation from definite descriptions also exhibit regularity.

APPENDIX A

Examples of Acronyms with Compound Noun Source Phrases

ALEC, the American Legislative Exchange Council

1. In 1982, ALEC began developing its first health care initiatives. [ALEC, "Background about ALEC," 2003, <http://www.alec.org>]
(Cf. *In 1982, the ALEC began developing...)
2. 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. [Ibid.]
(Cf. *The mission of American Legislative Exchange Council is to advance...)

AMRIID, the Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases

1. Specifically, we determined whether AMRIID complied with the DoD Year 2000 Management Plan. [AMRIID, "Department of Defense Office of the Inspector General—Audit," Nov. 13, 1998, <http://www.dodig.osd.mil/audit/reports/fy99/99035sum.htm>]
(Cf. *...we determined whether the AMRIID complied with...)
2. 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.]
(Cf. *... to determine whether Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases was adequately preparing...)

APSA, the American Political Science Association

1. Because of this, APSA is changing the annual membership cycle. [APSA, "Changes to Membership Cycle in 2003," 2003, <http://www.apsanet.org/about>]
(Cf. *... the APSA is changing the annual membership cycle.)
2. 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, "Guiding Political Science in the 21st Century," 2003, <http://www.apsanet.org/about>]
(Cf. *American Political Science Association is the world's...)

ARCA, the Automobile Racing Club of America

1. ARCA has now sanctioned races in 17 states.... [ARCA, "History60-69," 2003, <http://www.arcaracing.com/Remax/history60-69.html>]
(Cf. *The ARCA has now sanctioned races in 17 states....)
2. The MARC name goes away in favor of ARCA, the Automobile Racing Club of America. [Ibid.]
(Cf. *The MARC name goes away in favor of ARCA, Automobile Racing Club of America.)

ASCII, the American Standard Code for Information Interchange

1. ASCII was actually designed for use with teletypes. [ASCIITable.com, "ASCII Table and Description," 2003, <http://www.asciitable.com>]
(Cf. *The ASCII was actually designed for use with...)

2. In 1963, ASA announced the American Standard Code for Information Interchange. [Steven J. Searle, "A Brief History of Character Codes," Feb. 12, 2002, <http://tronweb.super-nova.co.jp/characcodehist.html>]

(Cf. *In 1963, ASA announced American Standard Code for Information Interchange.)

ASLEF, the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen

1. ASLEF was founded in 1880. [ASLEF, "Welcome to ASLEF Online," May 20, 2003, <http://www.aslef.org.uk>]

(Cf. *The ASLEF was founded in 1880.)

2. Your Petitioner, the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen ("ASLEF"), is a trades union representing train and tram drivers throughout the United Kingdom. [Andrew Murray, "ASLEF Petitions Parliament in Support of Mersey Tunnels Bill," 2002, <http://www.aslef.org.uk/news/news9-2.html>]

(Cf. *Your Petitioner, Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen...)

ASMI, the American Sports Medicine Institute

1. However, non-profit foundations like ASMI have limited budgets.... [ASMI, "Communications," Jan. 2, 2002, <http://www.asmi.org/asmiweb/Communications.htm>]

(Cf. *... non-profit foundations like the ASMI have limited budgets....)

2. 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. [Morgan King, "Primary Care Sports Medicine Fellowship," Aug. 14, 2001, <http://www.asmi.org/asmiweb/education/fellowship%20program/primaryCare.htm>]

(Cf. *American Sports Medicine Institute ... has instituted a Primary Care Sports Medicine Fellowship.)

CEPPO, the Chemical Emergency Preparedness and Prevention Office

1. To that end, CEPPO 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, "CEPPO's Mission," July 12, 2002, <http://yosemite.epa.gov/oswer/ceppoweb.nsf/content/mission.htm>]

(Cf. *The CEPPO works with numerous Federal, State...)

2. About the Chemical Emergency Preparedness and Prevention Office [Ibid.]

(Cf. *About Chemical Emergency Preparedness and Prevention Office)

CERES, the California Environmental Resources Evaluation System

1. CERES is an information system developed by... [CERES, "Welcome to Ceres," 2000, <http://ceres.ca.gov/>]

(Cf. *The CERES is an information system developed by...)

2. Welcome to CERES, the California Environmental Resources Evaluation System [Ibid.]

(Cf. *California Environmental Resources Evaluation System is an information system....)

CITES, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species

1. ...the commitment of 145 member countries to the principles established by CITES. [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2003, <http://www.fws.gov/r9dia/global/cites.html>]

(Cf. *... principles established by the CITES.)

2. ...the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, a treaty in effect since 1975. [Ibid.]

(Cf. *... principles established by Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species...)

COBRA, the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act

1. Under COBRA, a group health plan ordinarily is defined as a plan that... [Cobra Insurance.com, "What Is COBRA Insurance?" 2003, http://www.cobrainsurance.com/COBRA_Law.htm]

(Cf. *Under the COBRA, a group health plan is...)

2. Congress passed the landmark Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act [Ibid.]

(Cf. *Under Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act, a group health plan...)

CSIS /sisis/, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service

1. CSIS is a government agency dedicated to protecting the national security interests of Canada. [CSIS, "Welcome," Nov. 28, 2001, http://www.csis-scrs.gc.ca/eng/menu/welcome_e.html]

(Cf. *The CSIS is a government agency dedicated to...)

2. Welcome to the Internet site of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) [Ibid.]

(Cf. *Welcome to the Internet site of Canadian Security Intelligence Service)

DOGAMI, the (Oregon) Department Of Geology And Mineral Industries

1. DOGAMI is also a member of the research team that is currently investigating the Portland Hills Fault. [James Roddey, "Upcoming Events and Ongoing Projects," Oregon Department of Geology and Mineral Industries, 2003, <http://www.oregongeology.com/ongoingpro/ongoinghome.htm>]

(Cf. *The DOGAMI is also a member of the research team....)

2. The next General Board Meeting of the Oregon Department of Geology and Mineral Industries will be held in Portland.... [Ibid.]

(Cf. *The next General Board Meeting of Oregon Department of Geology and Mineral Industries...)

ERIC, the Educational Resources Information Center

1. ERIC produces a variety of publications.... [ERIC, "Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) and Other Clearinghouses," June 21, 2002, <http://www.ed.gov/EdRes/EdFed/ERIC.html>]

(Cf. *The ERIC produces a variety of publications....)

2. 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.]

(Cf. *Educational Resources Information Center ... is a nationwide information network....)

FASAB, the Federal Accounting Standards Advisory Board

1. This website provides access to all publications issued by FASAB.... [Marian Nicholson, "Welcome to the Federal Accounting Standards Advisory Board," 2002, <http://www.fasab.gov/>]

(Cf. *... to all publications issued by the FASAB....)

2. The *Federal Accounting Standards Advisory Board* promulgates accounting principles for federal government reporting entities." [Ibid.]

(Cf. *Federal Accounting Standards Advisory Board promulgates....)

FOSE, the Federal Office Systems Exposition

1. FOSE is the largest information technology exposition serving the government marketplace. [a2z Inc., "Welcome to the FOSE 2003 Homepage!" 2002, <http://www.fose.com>]

(Cf. *The FOSE is the largest information technology....)

2. The Federal Office Systems Exposition (FOSE) is the most comprehensive technology event serving the government market. [Intel Corporation, "Intel Press Events: Federal Office Systems Expo," Mar. 19, 2002, <http://www.intel.com/pressroom/archive/events/2002/fose2002.htm>]

(Cf. *Federal Office Systems Exposition ... is the most comprehensive technology event....)

FRAME, the Fund for the Replacement of Animals in Medical Experiments

1. FRAME considers that the current scale of live animal experimentation is unacceptable and should not be allowed to continue. [FRAME, "Aims of FRAME," 2002, http://www.frame.org.uk/Aims_of_Frame.htm]

(Cf. *The FRAME considers that the...)

2. In September 1969, they founded The Fund for the Replacement of Animals in Medical Experiments. [FRAME, "A Short History of FRAME," 2002, <http://www.frame.org.uk/History.htm>]

(Cf. *...they founded Fund for the Replacement of Animals in Medical Experiments.)

NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement

1. NAFTA has shown it works for America.... [U.S. Trade Representative, "NAFTA Overview," 1999, <http://www.ustr.gov/regions/whemisphere/overview.shtml>]

(Cf. *The NAFTA has shown it works for America....)

2. 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.]

(Cf. *North American Free Trade Agreement points us...)

NASA, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration

1. 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. [Dolores Beasley and Catherine Watson, "What Happens to the Brain in Space? New NASA Book Has the Answers," May 12, 2003, NASA, http://www.nasa.gov/home/hqnews/2003/may/03167_neurolab_book.html]
(Cf. *The NASA released a new book....)
2. 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. [Roger D. Launius and Steve Garber, "Nasa History in Brief," NASA, Aug. 10, 2001, <http://history.nasa.gov/brief.html>]
(Cf. *...the official start of National Aeronautics and Space Administration...)

NEMO, the North East Map Organization

1. NEMO's principal region is CT, DE, ME, MA, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT. [David J. Bertuca, "NEMO: The North East Map Organization," NEMO, Apr. 10, 2000, <http://ublib.buffalo.edu/libraries/asl/maps/nemo.html>]
(Cf. *The NEMO's principal region is...)
2. NEMO: The North East Map Organization" [Ibid.]
(Cf. *North East Map Association's principal region is...)

NIAID, the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases

1. 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, "Overview," June 17, 2002, <http://www.niaid.nih.gov/facts/overview.htm>]
(Cf. *The NIAID has a distinguished record....)
2. The National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) is a component of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). [Ibid.]
(Cf. *National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases is a component...)

NIMH, the National Institute of Mental Health

1. The mission of NIMH is to reduce the burden of mental illness and behavioral disorders through research on mind, brain, and behavior. [Thomas R. Insel, "Director's Page," NIMH, Nov. 20, 2002, <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/about/director.cfm>]
(Cf. *The NIMH sponsors....)
2. The mission of the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) is to diminish the burden of mental illness through research. [NIMH Office of Communications, "Welcome," June 1, 1999, <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/about/index.cfm>]
(Cf. *The mission of National Institute of Mental Health...)

NSERC /ensl.k/, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council

1. 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, "NSERC in Brief," May 2, 2002, <http://www.nserc.ca/about/inbrief.htm>]

(Cf. *The NSERC supports both basic university research...)

2. 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.]

(Cf. *Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council supports both basic...)

OPEC, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries

1. OPEC had its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, in the first five years of its existence. [OPEC, "History," 2000, <http://www.opec.org>]

(Cf. *The OPEC had its headquarters...)

2. 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.]

(Cf. *Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries is a permanent...)

RADA, the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art

1. I'm still at school, but would like to apply to RADA. [Gordon Ashbee, "Royal Academy of Dramatic Art Frequently Asked Questions," RADA, 2002, <http://www.rada.org/faq.html>]

(Cf. *I'm still at school but would like to apply to the RADA.)

2. A brief history of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. [Gordon Ashbee, "A Brief History of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art," RADA, 2002, <http://www.rada.org/history.html>]

(Cf. *A brief history of Royal Academy of Dramatic Art.)

SEPTA, the South Eastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority

1. SEPTA is proud to be the provider of these services. ... [Faye Moore, "A Message from the GM," SEPTA Online, <http://www.septa.org/inside/gm.html>]

(Cf. *The SEPTA is proud to be...)

2. The South Eastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority, whose R3 trains regularly haul students from the base of campus into Philadelphia, has recently increased its fares. [George Petel, "SEPTA Increases Fares This Year," *Swarthmore College Daily Gazette Online*, Oct. 1, 2001, http://www.sccs.swarthmore.edu/org/daily/archive/fall_2001/20011001/news2.html]

(Cf. *South Eastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority ... has recently increased its fares.)

SETI, the Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence

1. As the perception grew that SETI had a reasonable prospect for success ... [SETI Institute, "History of SETI," 2003, http://www.seti.org/seti/seti_background/Welcome.html]

(Cf. *As the perception grew that the SETI had a reasonable prospect...)

2. 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.]

(Cf. *... that Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence had a reasonable...)

SSHRC /ʃɪ.ɪk/, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council

1. SSHRC is governed by a 22-member Council.... [SSHRC, "About SSHRC: We Build Understanding," May 20, 2003, http://www.sshrc.ca/web/about/about_e.asp]

(Cf. *The SSHRC is governed by a 22-member Council....)

2. The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) is an arms-length federal agency.... [Ibid.]

(Cf. *Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada ... is an arms-length...)

UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization

1. To fulfill its mandate, UNESCO performs five principal functions. [UNESCO, "What Is UNESCO?" 2000, <http://www.unesco.org/general/eng/about/what.shtml>]

(Cf. *... the UNESCO performs five...)

2. 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, "Manual of the General Conference, Section A: Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization," Paris: UNESCO, 2002]

(Cf. *... they do hereby create United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization....)

UNICEF, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

1. 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, "Changing the World with Children," 2003, <http://www.unicef.org/uwwide>]

(Cf. *The UNICEF helps children....)

2. 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.]

(Cf. *United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund helps children....)

WCCFL /wɪkfəl/, the West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics

1. You will be responsible for paying for your own meal, but WCCFL will provide transportation.... [Nathan Sanders, "Friday Dinner," YPERLINK, 2002, <http://ling.ucsc.edu/~wccfl-21/friday-dinner.html>]

(Cf. *The WCCFL will provide transportation....)

2. The permanent home of the West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics [Leston Buell, "wccfl.org," July 8, 2002, <http://www.linguistics.ucla.edu/WCCFL/>]
(Cf. *The permanent home of West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics)

APPENDIX B

Examples of Initialisms with Compound Noun Source Phrases

ACLU, the American Civil Liberties Union

1. In 1920, when the ACLU was founded by Roger Baldwin, Crystal Eastman, Albert DeSilver and others, civil liberties were in a sorry state. [ACLU, "Freedom Is Why We're Here," 1999, <http://www.aclu.org/Files/OpenFile.cfm?id=10740>]
(Cf. *In 1920, when ACLU was founded...)
2. 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.]
(Cf. *American Civil Liberties Union is our nation's guardian of liberty...)

AMA, the American Medical Association

1. The common sense reforms the AMA supports are not part of some untested theory; they work. [AMA in Washington, "Medical Liability Reform," Mar. 25, 2003, <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/7861.html>]
(Cf. *The common sense reforms AMA supports...)
2. Born in 1817, Nathan Smith Davis founded the American Medical Association when he was just thirty years old. [Allen J. Podraza, "Nathan Smith Davis," AMA, Mar. 31, 2003, <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/article/1916-4389.html>]
(Cf. *... Nathan Smith Davis founded American Medical Association...)

BLM, the Bureau of Land Management

1. The BLM sustains the health, diversity, and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. [U.S. Bureau of Land Management, "U.S. Department of the Interior Bureau of Land Management," May 20, 2003, <http://www.blm.gov/nhp/index.htm>]
(Cf. *BLM sustains the health, diversity...)
2. 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.]
(Cf. *Bureau of Land Management ... administers 261 million acres...)

CIA, the Central Intelligence Agency

1. To accomplish its mission, the CIA engages in research, development, and deployment of high-leverage technology for intelligence purposes. [CIA, "About

the CIA,” May 9, 2003, <http://www.cia.gov/cia/information/info.html>]

(Cf. *... CIA engages in research....)

2. The Central Intelligence Agency was created in 1947 with the signing of the National Security Act by President Truman. [Ibid.]

(Cf. *Central Intelligence Agency was created....)

CSPCA, the Canadian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

1. During the early years, the primary concern of the CSPCA was improving the treatment of work horses. [SPCA, “About Us: History,” 2003, <http://www.sPCA.com/anglais/frameset.html>]

(Cf. *... the primary concern of CSPCA....)

2. 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.]

(Cf. *Canadian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals ... was the first humane society....)

DNC, the Democratic National Committee

1. The DNC is the oldest continuing party committee in the United States and the world. [DNC, “What We Do: History of the Party and the Committee,” 1995, <http://www.democrats.org/about/function.html>]

(Cf. *DNC is the oldest continuing party committee....)

2. The Democratic National Convention established the Democratic National Committee (DNC) in 1848. [Ibid.]

(Cf. *... established Democratic National Committee ... in 1848.)

DOD, the Department of Defense

1. 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, “Welcome to DoDBusOpps.com!” May 21, 2003, <http://dodbusopps.com>]

(Cf. *... opportunities to sell to DoD....)

2. The Department of Defense has a budget of three hundred seventy-one billion dollars and more than two million employees. [DefenseLINK, “Welcome to the Department of Defense,” Nov. 12, 2002, http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/dod101/dod101_for_2002.html]

(Cf. *Department of Defense has a budget....)

FAA, the Federal Aviation Administration

1. The FAA operates the world’s biggest and safest aviation system. [FAA, “FAA Career Opportunities,” 2003, <http://jobs.faa.gov/>]

(Cf. *FAA operates the world’s....)

2. Consider a career with the Federal Aviation Administration. [Ibid.]

(Cf. *... a career with Federal Aviation Administration.)

FBI, the Federal Bureau of Investigation

1. 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, “About Us,” 2003, <http://www.fbi.gov/aboutus.htm>]

(Cf. *... FBI has unique response capability to act...)

2. 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, "The New Deal (1933-late 1930s)," 2003, <http://www.fbi.gov/libref/historic/history/newdeal.htm>]

(Cf. *... Federal Bureau of Investigation was thus born.)

GOP, the Grand Old Party

1. For over one hundred years, the Republican Party has been called the GOP. [Republican National Committee, "Who We Are," 2003, <http://www.rnc.org/gopinfo>]

(Cf. *... has been called GOP.)

2. 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. [Republican National Committee, "Who We Are: Origin of 'GOP'," 2003, <http://www.rnc.org/gopinfo/origin>]

(Cf. *Republican leaders took to referring to "grand old party"...)

IRA, the Irish Republican Army

1. 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. [Paul Arthur, "The Conflict: Civil Rights," PBS, 1998, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/ira/conflict/>]

(Cf. *What happened ... was that IRA came into its own.)

2. It was the burnings in Belfast in August of '69, I'm convinced, which led to the resurrection of the Irish Republican Army. [Ibid.]

(Cf. *... the resurrection of Irish Republican Army.)

LSA, the Linguistic Society of America

1. The LSA accepts listings from academic institutions under censure by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). [LSA, "Job Opportunities," May 21, 2003, <http://www.lsadc.org/web2/jobsfr.htm>]

(Cf. *LSA accepts listings from...)

2. THE LINGUISTIC SOCIETY OF AMERICA was founded in 1924 for the advancement of the scientific study of language. [LSA, "Linguistic Society of America," June 1, 1998, <http://www.lsadc.org/web2/index.html>]

(Cf. *LINGUISTIC SOCIETY OF AMERICA was founded...)

MBTA, the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority

1. The MBTA has met increasing demand with new technologies and expanded services. [Daniel A. Grabauskas, "From the Secretary," MBTA, 2003, <http://www.mbta.com/insidethet/secretary.asp>]

(Cf. *MBTA has met increasing demand with...)

2. 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). [Ibid.]

(Cf. *... the web site of Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority.)

MLA, the Modern Language Association

1. 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, "Learn More about the Modern Language Association," Oct. 17, 2001, <http://www.mla.org/>]
(Cf. *... the 18 prizes MLA awards...)
2. 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.]
(Cf. *Modern Language Association of America provides opportunities...)

NCAA, the National Collegiate Athletic Association

1. By 1919, there were 170 institutions in the NCAA, and the Association was directly involved in 11 sports. [Fay Hawes, "NCAA Born from Need to Bridge Football and Higher Education," Nov. 8, 1999, <http://www.ncaa.com/news/1999/19991108/active/3623n27.html>]
(Cf. *... there were 170 institutions in NCAA...)
2. 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.]
(Cf. *... it renamed itself National Collegiate Athletic Association...)

NFL, the National Football League

1. For the first time, all of the franchises considered to be part of the NFL fielded teams." [NFL, "NFL History: Chronology 1921-1930," 2002, <http://www.nfl.com/history/chronology/1921-1930.html>]
(Cf. *... considered to be part of NFL...)
2. The American Professional Football Association changed its name to the National Football League, June 24. [Ibid.]
(Cf. *... changed its name to National Football League...)

NHL, the National Hockey League

1. At its inception, the NHL boasted five franchises.... [John Davidson and John Steinbreder, *Hockey for Dummies* (Foster City, Calif.: IDG, 1997); excerpt available at <http://nhl.com/hockeyu/history/evolution.html>]
(Cf. *NHL boasted five franchises...)
2. 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.]
(Cf. *... be known as National Hockey League.)

NIH, the National Institute of Health

1. An agency of the Department of Health and Human Services, the NIH is the Federal focal point for health research. [NIH, "The NIH Almanac," July 31, 2002, <http://www.nih.gov/about/almanac/index.html>]
(Cf. *... NIH is the Federal focal point for health research.)

2. 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.]

(Cf. *...National Institutes of Health (NIH) today is one of the world's foremost medical research centers.)

NRA, the National Rifle Association

1. After being granted a charter by the state of New York on November 17, 1871, the NRA was founded. [NRAmembership.org, "History of the NRA," 2002, <http://www.nramembership.org/history.htm>]

(Cf. *...NRA was founded.)

2. 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.]

(Cf. *... Gen. George Wingate formed National Rifle Association in 1871.)

NSF, the National Science Foundation

1. Find out more about the NSF, from 1950 to the present. [NSF, "History," Mar. 28, 2003, <http://www.nsf.gov/od/lpa/nsf50/history.htm>]

(Cf. *Find out more about NSF, from...)

2. 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. [Ibid.]

(Cf. *... the Congress established National Science Foundation....)

NYPD, the New York Police Department

1. We think the NYPD is the greatest police department in America, and one of the finest law enforcement agencies in the world. [Joseph J. Esposito, "A message from the Chief," NYPD, 2000, <http://www.ci.nyc.ny.us/html/nypd/html/chfdept/wmsg.html>]

(Cf. *We think NYPD is the...)

2. 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, "About NYPD," 2003, <http://www.ci.nyc.ny.us/html/nypd/html/mission.html>]

(Cf. *The Mission of New York City Police Department is...)

NYSE, the New York Stock Exchange

1. Restoring investor confidence continues to be of paramount importance to the NYSE. [Dick Grasso, "Welcome from the Chairman," NYSE, 2003, <http://www.nyse.com/about/p1020656067652.html?displayPage=%2Fabout%2F1022221392718.html>]

(Cf. *... of paramount importance to NYSE.)

2. 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, "The NYSE Has a Long and Fascinating History," 2003, <http://www.nyse.com/about/p1020656067652.html?displayPage=%2Fabout%2F1022221392718.html>]

(Cf. *New York Stock Exchange traces its origins back...)

PLO, the Palestine Liberation Organization

1. 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. [U.S. Dept. of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism*, publication 10321; excerpt available at <http://library.nps.navy.mil/home/tgp/plo.htm>]

(Cf. *... Arafat committed PLO to cease all violence and terrorism.)

2. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) has been the embodiment of the Palestinian national movement. [Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations, "Palestine Liberation Organization: Introduction," 1999, <http://www.palestine-un.org/plo/frindex.html>]

(Cf. *Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) has been...)

PUK, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan

1. 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. [Scott Wilson, "Kurds' Influence in Kirkuk Rises along with Discord," *Washington Post*, May 18, 2003, A10]

(Cf. *PUK has moved part of its interior ministry...)

2. 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.]

(Cf. *... eager leaders from Patriotic Union of Kurdistan...)

RCMP, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police

1. The RCMP is unique in the world since it is a national, federal, provincial and municipal policing body. [RCMP, "About the RCMP," Feb. 26, 2003, http://www.rcmp.ca/about/index_e.htm]

(Cf. *RCMP is unique in the world...)

2. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police is the Canadian national police service and an agency of the Ministry of the Solicitor General of Canada. [Ibid.]

(Cf. *Royal Canadian Mounted Police is the Canadian...)

SEC, the Securities and Exchange Commission

1. 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. [SEC, "Introduction—The SEC: Who We Are and What We Do," Mar. 19, 2003, <http://www.sec.gov/about/whatwedo.shtml>]

(Cf. *SEC also oversees other key participants...)

2. 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.]

(Cf. *The primary mission of U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission...)

UNFCCC, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

1. However, if you should require them for other purposes, you will require the written authorization of the UNFCCC. [UNFCCC, "About UNFCCC.INT Web Site," 2003, <http://unfccc.int/siteinfo/siteinfo.html>]
(Cf. *... the written authorization of UNFCCC...)
2. 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, "Understanding Climate Change: A Beginner's Guide to the U.N. Framework Convention and its Kyoto Protocol," 2002, http://unfccc.int/resource/beginner_02_en.pdf]
(Cf. *1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is one of...)

USA, the United States of America

1. This time you continue to catch Carmen Sandiego and her American gang in the U.S.A. [Moby Games, "Where in the U.S.A. is Carmen Sandiego?" Feb. 20, 2003, <http://www.mobygames.com/game/sheet/gameId,8471/>]
(Cf. *...in U.S.A.)
2. Joint Statement Between the United States of America and the Republic of the Philippines. [Ari Fleischer, "Joint Statement Between the United States of America and the Republic of the Philippines," White House Press Release, May 19, 2003, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/05/iraq/20030519-3.html>]
(Cf. *Joint Statement Between United States of America...)

USSR, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

1. Still, the U.S.S.R. was America's foreign-policy obsession for more than 40 years. [Mark Jenkins, "Back in the USSR: Sure the Soviet Union Is No More, but There Are a Few Reminders Left Even Here," *Washington Post*, May 1, 1998, N6]
(Cf. *Still, USSR was America's foreign-policy obsession....)
2. 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. [Lee Hockstader, "'Force Breeds Force' in October Revolution of 1993: Wounded Anti-Yeltsin Rebel Remains Unrepentant, Unbowed," *Washington Post*, Oct. 6, 1993, A21]
(Cf. *Still, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was America's foreign-policy...)

WTO, the World Trade Organization

1. Virtually all decisions in the WTO are taken by consensus among all member countries and they are ratified by members' parliaments. [WTO, "The WTO in Brief," 1999, http://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/whatis_e/inbrief_e/inbroo_e.htm]
(Cf. *...all decisions in WTO...)
2. The World Trade Organization (WTO) is the only international organization dealing with the global rules of trade between nations. [Ibid.]
(Cf. *World Trade Organization (WTO) is the only international organization...)

NOTES

1. The terms *abbreviation*, *initialism*, and *acronym* have not been used consistently by scholars. For example, Quirk et al. (1985) use *acronym* to refer to any shortening formed from the initial letters of each word in the source phrase and do not distinguish between those pronounced letter by letter or as a word. Cannon (1989) uses *initialism* to refer to these shortenings and distinguishes between those pronounced letter by letter (*abbreviation*) or as a word (*acronym*). Here I have adopted the labels used by Algeo (1991) and Crystal (2003), with *abbreviation* used as the general term to refer to any shortened form used to stand in for a word or phrase.
2. Cannon (1989, 116) actually reports a figure of 16% for initialisms when explicitly comparing the two groups, but the raw figures he gives (63 proper names of 461 nominal initialisms) indicate that 13.7% is closer to correct.
3. A reviewer notes that in fact there are a few exceptions to the no-determiner-with-proper name rule, nearly all geographical: *the Mississippi*, *the Gulf of Mexico*.
4. 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.
5. We are not here considering the categorial status of abbreviations of NPs which are NOT definite descriptions, such as *SUV* (Sport Utility Vehicle), *PC* (Personal Computer), or *POW* (Prisoner Of War). A casual glance suggests that they tend to retain their categorial status when they are initialisms and behave more variably when acronyms, but obviously in these matters a casual glance will not tell us much.
6. All Web sites cited here were accessed May 20–22, 2003.
7. These examples are culled from Web sites, mostly Web sites maintained by the organizations themselves. The particular abbreviations were chosen from acronym dictionaries and lists available online; a somewhat haphazard process, as most abbreviations are not formed from definite descriptions, and it is difficult to know how completely representative this sample is. Also, for some abbreviations, it is impossible to know if they are acronyms or initialisms based on their written form; consequently I had to restrict my search to ones that were familiar enough from speech (to me or one of my consultants) to be certain of their pronunciation. However, based on the grammaticality judgments of native speakers (the author and three others), the prevalence of the observed pattern in the data collected, and the regular and limited nature of the observed exceptions, it seems reasonably certain that the pattern exemplified is typical. (Note that brute searching for strings of “*the* + abbreviation” on an Internet search engine will turn up many false positives, as abbreviations show up inside compounds headed by other nouns quite frequently—strings like *The NASA Astrophysics Data System* or *The NIMH Genetic Study of Schizophrenia*.)
8. An anonymous reviewer notes that the usual direction is for proper names to become common nouns (*Xerox*, *Kleenex*), with the implication that the proposed

direction of change for the *ENIAC* acronym is somewhat implausible. Usually when the proper-name-to-common-noun direction of transfer is applicable, however, there are many different instances of the item in question around, with the proper-noun instance being the most salient. In this case, the common noun (*the*) *ENIAC* refers uniquely—there were no other ENIACs around; one could not talk about *this ENIAC* or *that ENIAC*. Consequently it strikes me that this is a fairly natural development, in the same way that a young child might name a dog *Dog*, or the way *Mom* and *Dad* become proper names in contexts where they refer uniquely, but are common nouns in contexts where they do not (*my mom*, *the dad in that family*).

9. Interestingly, both the British Broadcasting Corporation (*the BBC*) and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (*the CBC*) behave like regular initialisms 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.
10. 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.
11. 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, “WWF—Who We Are,” 2003, http://www.panda.org/about_wwf/who_we_are/index.cfm]

12. An anonymous reviewer notes that abbreviations for academic society meetings are often used without the determiner: *Are you going to LSA this year?* These presumably fall into this class of abbreviated, clipped compounds, where the clipped element is the head noun *meeting* (*the Linguistic Society of America meeting*). These meeting-abbreviations may also fall into bare-NP location class (*school*, *UCLA*) noted above, since the meetings of academic societies are held in a definite place. The reviewer suggests that such uses may allow the determinerless use to get its foot in the door, so to speak, as the correct way to refer to the organization generally, and cites the following sentence from *Newsletter of the American Dialect Society* 35.1, 4: “Several members pointed out that it has been difficult to find out how to join ADS.”

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