

TOM 3

The Third Toronto-Ottawa-Montreal Semantics Workshop

March 6, 2010, McGill University

In the restaurant (basement) of Thomson House (David Thomson Post-Graduate Centre)

3650 McTavish Street

9:00 Registration and coffee/muffins

9:30-10:30 Invited talk (Session chair: Alexandra Simonenko)

The meaning of ECM: what fuzzy data can reveal

Keir Moulton, *McGill University*

10:30-11:00

Focus, scope and *again*-ambiguities

Walter Pedersen, *McGill University*

11:00-11:30 Break

11:30-12:00

(Session chair: Walter Pedersen)

Persian bare nouns

Fereshteh Modarresi, *University of Ottawa*

12:00-12:30

Adjectival focus operator in Norwegian and Swedish DP

Alexandra Simonenko, *McGill University*

12:30-2:00 Lunch at Thomson House

2:00-2:30

(Session chair: David-Étienne Bouchard)

Generic *one*

Daryl Chow, *University of Ottawa*

~~**The perfect side of the imperfective aspect in Polish and Russian**~~

~~Ewelina Fraekowiak, *University of Ottawa*~~

~~Canceled~~

2:30-3:00

“Degree constructions” with non-gradable nouns

Jason McCrimmon, *University of Toronto*

3:00-3:30

Shifting perspective in epistemic statements

Lorenzo Patino, *University of Ottawa*

3:30-4:00 Break

4:00-5:00 Invited talk

(Session chair: Eva Dobler)

You, etc.

Ana Arregui, *University of Ottawa*

(Dinner arrangements for interested people. Please let Junko Shimoyama know if you are interested.)

The meaning of ECM: what fuzzy data can reveal

Keir Moulton, McGill University

Exceptional Case Marking (ECM) constructions have been a central part of syntactic theorizing and are an example *par excellence* of a syntax-semantics mismatch. I nonetheless argue that ECM complements carry with them a semantic interpretation distinct from finite complements. To see this, we will look at what is revealed by the “fuzziness” in acceptability of ECM in English (Postal 1974, Borkin 1984, Pesetsky 1991). Verbs like *say* and *wager*, while marginal with ECM complements, attribute belief on the part of the subject (1). The implication of belief is not necessary when these verbs take finite complements (2).

- (1) a. I'd say him to be about 5 foot. #...but I know he's not.
b. I'd wager him to be about 5 foot. #...but I know he's not.
- (2) If I were you, I'd (just) say that he's about 5 feet ...even though we know he's not.

It is proposed that complements to attitude predicates are introduced by meaningful functional heads that express modal quantification (Kratzer 2006, Anand and Hacqaurd 2008, Moulton 2009). The head that introduces ECM complements requires the embedding verb to report a belief state. This decompositional approach predicts fuzziness in judgments because the compatibility of verbs in the ECM “frame” is subject to the vagaries of lexical variation (Borer 2005).

Focus, Scope and *again*-ambiguities

Walter Pedersen
McGill University

There have been two recent approaches to explaining so-called *again*-ambiguities such as that found in (1): a structural account and a focus-based account.

- (1) The door opened again.
repetitive reading: ‘The door opened, and the door had opened before’
non-repetitive reading: ‘The door opened, and the door had been open before’

The structural account (discussed in Von Stechow 1995, Dowty 1979 and others) explains the ambiguity in terms of the scope *again* takes with respect to a decomposed predicate, as shown in (2).

- (2) a. [again [BECOME [the door open]]] *repetitive*
b. [BECOME [again [the door open]]] *non-repetitive*

The structural account is said to straightforwardly account for the effect that word-order (namely the preposing of *again*) has on the availability of readings.

- (3) again, the door opened. *repetitive only*

The focus-based account proposed in Beck 2006 takes as its starting point the effect that sentential focus has on the availability of readings, as shown in (4).

- (4) a. The door opened AGAIN. *repetitive*
b. The door OPENED again. *non-repetitive*

The two readings are then explained as resulting from the particular sets of alternatives introduced by the focus semantics for each reading. The focus-based account is not presented as an alternative to the scopal account; rather, the two accounts are presented as having different domains of application. Thus the scopal account, as Beck notes, does not explain the effect that focus has on reading availability, while the focus account does not (straightforwardly) explain the word-order facts. We are thus left with two independent explanations of *again*-ambiguities: a syntactic one and a focus-pragmatic one. It is, however, unclear exactly what is the domain of applicability of each of these accounts, and whether or not they interact.

The goal of the current research is to answer these questions, and thus to determine whether there is in fact a need for two separate accounts of *again*-based ambiguities. Through experimentally testing the effects of sentential focus on reading availability, an attempt will be made to determine how scope and focus interact; the goal is thus to provide a more unified account of *again*-ambiguities.

Beck, S. 2006. Focus on ‘again’. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 29:277-314.

Dowty, D. 1979. *Word meaning and Montague grammar*. Dordrecht: Reidel.

von Stechow, A. 1996. ‘The different readings of *wieder* ‘again’. *Journal of Semantics* 13:87-138.

Persian bare nouns, like English bare plurals, can have a kind, generic or existential reading. But they also have a definite reading in subject position. This paper intends to describe the conditions under which each reading is permitted in subject position. The factors that play major roles in the interpretation of bare singular (henceforth BS) in Persian include, Information Structure, Predicate type, aspectual properties of the predicate, as well as the position of the BS in the sentence. I will argue that with stage level predicates in episodic sentences Persian BS subjects are interpreted as definite when they are in Topic position and existential when they are focused.

The definite reading of BS can be explained by Chierchia, 1998 blocking principle but is motivated for Information Structure (IS) reasons; The lack of definite marker (definite singular) in Persian allows the BS expand its interpretive range and include definite interpretation as well. For Persian, a language with a relatively free word order, with no definite article, a movement of BS to Topic position makes definite reading available (Similarly in Persian indefinites specific readings are obtained when indefinites are scrambled in a higher position (Karimi, 2003)).

In this paper I have adopted Deising (1992) mapping structure: focused BS subjects are mapped in to nuclear scope and Topic BS subjects are mapped in to restrictor clause and further modification is done to account for Persian data.

With Individual Level Predicates (ILPs), an abstract generic operator (Gen) binds free variables on BS subjects in the restrictor clause. Since we have both definite and Generic reading available with ILPs, BS is either within the binding scope of Gen interpreted quasi-universally or it moves higher up to a topic position, where it is interpreted as definite, (postulating a Topic phrase above IP). Persian data shows that BS objects follow the same mechanism moving to two higher positions with object marker *-ra*, being interpreted as generic or definite.

References

- Chierchia, G. (1998). Reference to Kinds Across Languages. *Natural Language Semantics* 6:339–405.
- Deising, Molly (1992). *Indefinites*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Karimi, Simin (2003a). On Object Positions, Specificity and Scrambling in Persian. In *Word Order and Scrambling*. Simin Karimi (ed.). Oxford: Blackwell.

Adjectival focus operator in Norwegian and Swedish DP

Alexandra Simonenko

McGill University

Norwegian (N.) and Swedish (S.) share the ‘double definiteness’ pattern where a pre-adjectival determiner *den/det* co-occurs with a suffixed definite determiner: *den gamle hund-en* (‘the old dog-def’, N.) and *den gamla hund-en* (‘the old dog-def’, S.). It is usually omitted with the so called ‘selectors’, such as *först* (‘first’), *vänster* (‘left’), *hel* (‘whole’) etc., ordinal numerals and superlatives, Dahl (2004). It can also be absent with other classes of adjectives. Cf.: *i bruna hus-et* (‘in the brown house’, S.) and *i det stora hus-et* (‘in the big house’, S.). In general, it seems that the omission is not restricted to a closed class of adjectives.

Although it has been often argued, starting with Delsing (1993), that the ‘double definiteness’ is a dummy-*den* insertion that happens when N-to-D movement is blocked by an adjective, I argue that *den/det* are not determiners but rather focus operators. First, as shown above, *den/det* can be omitted with an open list of adjectives. This presents a challenge for the intervention-repair accounts. Secondly, intuitively, *den/det* is present when the context contains relevant alternatives to the property denoted by the adjective. It is absent when either there are no relevant alternatives because the property is unique (‘selectors’) or if alternatives are not relevant. The latter happens when the nominal property clearly characterizes a singleton: in the context of deictic expressions such as *detta hus-et* (‘that house-def’, S.), in cases when it is known that there is just one entity having a property denoted by N, e.g. *stora rummet* (‘big room’ used when there is only one room under discussion), and in name-like uses (Dahl, 2004, 156-157).

Drawing on Heusinger (1997)’s adaptation of Rooth (1992) to focus in complex NPs, I propose to treat *den/det* as focus operator that introduces a contextually relevant set of alternatives to the property denoted by the adjective. It is a matter of world knowledge then to ‘fill in’ that set with the appropriate properties, such as ‘red’, ‘white’ and ‘rosé’ in the case of the color of wine. The alternative semantic composition of a focused adjective with a non-focused nominal tentatively proceeds along the lines of (Heusinger, 1997, 4) by combining every alternative in the set with the property denoted by the noun. The precise semantics of the focus operator as well as the motivations for its syntactic placement – namely whether it projects its own phrase in the left periphery of nominal expressions – are the questions of the ongoing research.

References

- Dahl, O. (2004). Definite articles in Scandinavian: Competing grammaticalization processes in standard and non-standard varieties. In B. Kortmann (Ed.), *Dialectology meets Typology: Dialect Grammar from a Cross-Linguistic Perspective*. Mouton de Gruyter.
- Delsing, P. (1993). *The internal structure of noun phrases in the Scandinavian languages*. Ph. D. thesis, University of Lund.
- Heusinger, K. v. (1997). Focus in complex noun phrases. In *Proceedings of the Eleventh Amsterdam Colloquium*, pp. 49–54.
- Rooth, M. (1992). A theory of focus interpretation. *Natural language semantics* 1(1), 75–116.

Title: *One*

The aim of this paper is to explore the semantic properties and restrictions of generic *one* across English and French. Generic *one* has been noted to show a special connection to the first person or intentional agent, and can occur in two distinct ways: [1] as a pronoun inducing genericity; and [2] as a bound variable, exemplified by the first and second occurrence of *one* in the sentence ‘One often loses one's belongings on a train.’ (Moltmann 2006:260). There are two generalizations about generic *one* that this paper seeks to reanalyze in light of French data; firstly, that there is always a connection to the first person, and secondly, that *one* must always occur with modal force. This paper then offers a ‘givenness’ or ‘obviousness’ solution to deal with the semantic

In French, *on* is used in its generic sense in sentences such as ‘C'est en forgeant qu'on devient forgeron’ (It is by blacksmithing that one becomes a blacksmith). However, *on* does not necessarily need to have a connection to the first person singular, a contrast from English *one*, as a common usage of *on* is to replace ‘we’ such as in the sentence ‘On est sur le point de partir’ (We are about to leave). Secondly, *on* can also be used in non-generic and therefore non-modal contexts in French, as can be seen from the last sentence. *On* can further be used to mean a specific ‘someone’, such as in ‘On me l'a donné’ (Someone gave it to me).

This paper further proposes a ‘givenness’ or ‘obviousness’ approach to generic *one*. Generic *one* comes under restrictions in semantic contexts which are unproblematic with other generic sentences that Moltmann is not able to adequately explain, illustrated by the contrast in the sentences below: (a) ?? One has a nose. (b) The typical person has a nose. The ‘givenness’ approach that this paper puts forth states that generic *one* is worse when it occurs with obvious or ‘given’ propositions. For example, when the proposition puts forth an obvious or assumed state of events such as ‘One has a nose’, the statement becomes semantically incongruous. This givenness approach is a gradient one, and the more ‘given’ a sentence is, the more semantically implausible it is. For example, ‘One has a nose’ is worse than ‘One has a nose-ring’ which is worse than ‘In this city, one has a nose-ring’. Verbs with more semantic content and specificity also improve this givenness constraint, explaining why the sentence ‘One has a car’ is worse than ‘One drives a car’, which in turn is worse than ‘One test-drives a car’. This semantic specificity also applies to nouns, making the sentence ‘One drives a Mercedes’ better than ‘One drives a car’. This givenness factor can also explain why generic *one* has been said to have ‘modal force’ (Moltmann 2006:260), because modal statements have instructive or directive flavour that make propositions sound less assumed and given to the listener. Furthermore, adverbs such as ‘rarely’ or ‘usually’ or also improve the givenness of a sentence in the respect that it gives new information to the listener, which is why ‘One usually has a nose’ is semantically much more sound than the sentence without the adverb. This also applies to adjuncts that pinpoint location or time such as ‘in this place’ or ‘at this time’, which all serve to improve the specificity and thus the semantic plausibility of the sentence.

References

Moltmann, Friederike. 2006. Generic One, Arbitrary PRO, and the First Person. *Natural Language Semantics* 14, pp. 257-281.

The Perfect Side of The Imperfective Aspect in Polish and Russian.

Ewelina Fraćkowiak

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In this paper, I explore the pragmatic component of the imperfective aspect in Polish and Russian constructions of the type shown in (1-2). I argue that such sentences carry a modal presupposition similarly to English constructions with Present Perfect analyzed by Portner 2003. Such presupposition can be best expressed in terms of epistemic modality and relies on causal facts established in the modal base. The readings of (1a), (2a) and (2b) correspond to the *resultative reading* of English Perfect, whereas (2b) represents the *current relevance* interpretation as discussed in Portner 2003. (1a) can be an answer to a question who may be a good competitor in the quiz about the Napoleonic era. In such case the conversational background for (1a) is: {If someone read a historic novel, then he/she has a good knowledge of the historic period described in that novel; The action of “War and Peace” is set in the Napoleonic era} (1b) may be a statement in reply to somebody’s wonders whether best American divas will ever consider coming to NAC in Ottawa. The modal base contains an assumption that the past event of Renée Fleming’s coming to NAC is an optimistic guide to the future.

- (1) a. Jola czytała “Wojnę i pokój”. Polish
Jola.Nom read.Imp.Past.3Sg.Fem “War and Peace”
‘Jola has read “War and Peace”.’
b. NAC gościło raz Renée Fleming.
NAC.Nom host.Past.Impf. once Renée Fleming.Acc
‘NAC had Renée Fleming as a guest once.’
- (2) a. Petja ubirał kvartiru. Russian
Petja clean.Imp.Past.Sg.Masc. apartment
‘Petja has cleaned a/the apartment.’
b. Petja odkrywał okno, poetomu v komnate tak xolodno.
Petja open.2Imp.Past.Masc window therefore in room so cold
‘Petja opened the window, that is why there is so cold in the room.’ (Borik 2006)

Such interpretations cannot be obtained in Romance languages (Italian, Spanish) by means of the Imperfect. The contrast between Polish and Italian imperfectives is shown in (3): the Italian sentence is infelicitous if uttered without any temporal referent available in the context.

- (3) a. #Gianni studiava matematica. Italian
‘Gianni studied.Impf math.’ (Giorgi and Pianesi 2004, p.261(2))
b. Jan studiował matematykę. Polish
John studied.Impf math
‘John studied math.’ / ‘John has studied math.’

Selected References.

- Borik, O. 2006. Aspect and Reference Time. Oxford University Press, New York.
Giorgi, A. and F. Pianesi. 2004. Speaker’s and Subject’s Temporal Representation. In *The Syntax of Time*, ed. Jacqueline Guéron and Jacqueline Lecarme. The MIT Press, Cambridge, 259-298
Portner, P. 2003. The (Temporal) Semantics and (Modal) Pragmatics of The Perfect. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 26:511–545.

Pedagogical Case & Modality by Lorenzo Patino

Abstract

Von Fintel & Gillies (2007) state that there are a limited number of knowledge perspectives that can be accessed in epistemic modals statements; if we have speakers A & B in a conversation, the knowledge perspectives that can be accessed when making epistemic modal statements can only include an A-only perspective, a B-only perspective, or an A+B shared knowledge pool perspective. They maintain that whichever one is accessed is limited to the speaker's knowledge perspective. So if speaker A is making an epistemic modal statement, then they are limited to an A-only perspective or an A+B perspective. This is formalized as the speaker inclusion constraint, which limits speaker A from taking a B-only perspective. Egan (2005) gave several exceptions where the speaker inclusion constraint does not seem to apply the way Von Fintel & Gillies propose. One such exception is the pedagogical case, which is primarily utilized in teaching.

This paper first isolates what gives license for the non-speaker perspective to be accessed within the pedagogical case by examining teaching as a collaborative speech act. The concept of knowledge authority is identified as the key feature that allows for the non-speaker perspective to be accessed. A broader definition of authority is proposed, one that is not necessarily linked to knowledge, as a way of accounting for the additional contexts where the non-speaker perspective is accessed. One such context is the courtroom, where a key feature of lawyer-witness interaction is the non-speaker perspective. An examination of this context as well as a re-evaluation of Egan's examples will help show how & why the non-speaker perspective is accessed. A modified judge operator, adapted from Stevenson (2008), will be used to account for the interface between the semantic and pragmatic level which allows for the non-speaker perspective to be accessed.