

February 17, 2006

CLASS 7: MODIFIERS

OVERVIEW

- *saturation*: filling in the missing piece of a property or relation
- paradigmatic case: *predication* (predicator plus its arguments)

Question: How do we semantically compute *modifiers*?
(our syntactic adjuncts, such as adjectives and adverbs)

Answer: By adding another process on top of predication — *modification*.

MODIFICATION

- | | | | |
|-----|----|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| (1) | a. | Ossie is a bird. | individual + property |
| | b. | John is a teacher. | |
| (2) | a. | Ossie is tall. | individual + property |
| | b. | John is dead. | |
| (3) | a. | Ossie is a tall bird. | individual + (property + property)? |
| | b. | John is a dead teacher. | |

Problem: If we think of *tall bird* as two properties with one on top of the other, these “two sub-predicates are not brought together by one saturating the other”

Solution: Call this process of overlaying (*predicate*) *modification* (Heim & Kratzer 1997)

In other words, we increase semantic complexity (two combination processes). We will have to do this either way we go and here are three possible routes (undecided):

- (i) Modification (or predicate modification) is a separate semantic process.
 - the meaning of a complex derives from saturating “overlaid predicates”
- (ii) Adjectives are ambiguous between a regular and a higher-order property.
 - predicative adjectives are semantically different from attributive adjectives
- (iii) Predicative adjectives are always higher-order properties.
 - define “higher-order” and rework predicative analysis

ADJECTIVES

So regardless of the exact outcome, let's take predicative adjectives to be *higher-order predicates* which can only be saturated by another predicate.

- *intersective* adjectives: intersection of more than one set (meaning of predicates)
- *vague* adjectives: exact meaning depends heavily on context / comparison

So, what about *non-vague* intersective predicates — is there a different process?

(For individual further research interests: look up and learn about *type-shifting*.)

- (4) a. Ossie is tall.
 b. Ossie is (a) tall (thing).
 c. Ossie is (a thing which is) tall.

Regardless of how we look at the relation between (4a) and (4b), (4c) suggests that we might be able to consider the semantic process underlying *relative clauses* similar to that of predicative adjectives, despite different syntax (e.g. pre- vs. post-nominal).

ADVERBS

- some adverbs modify verb phrases (e.g. manner adverbials)
- other adverbs modify clauses / sentences (e.g. modal adverbs)

Many adverbs can be thought of additions to the event structure.

- (5) a. Miss Emma purred loudly.
 b. Yesterday, Miss Emma ate tuna.
- (6) a. $\exists e[\text{Purring}(e) \wedge \text{Agent}(e, \text{Miss Emma}) \wedge \text{Manner}(e, \text{loudly})]$
 b. $\exists e[\text{Eating}(e) \wedge \text{Agent}(e, \text{Miss Emma}) \wedge \text{Patient}(e, \text{tuna}) \wedge \text{Time}(e, \text{yesterday})]$

But this event-modifying or -enriching view doesn't always work:

- (7) a. John *intentionally* met Mary.
 b. John chopped the onion *finely*.
 c. Surprisingly, John cried.

- adverbial modification similar to adjectives with meaning as a *complex property*?

REFERENCES

Heim, Irene & Angelika Kratzer. 1997. *Semantics in Generative Grammar*. Oxford: Blackwell.