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Semantics and Morphosyntactic Variation: Qualities and the Grammar of Property Concepts

Itamar Francez and Andrew Koontz-Garboden

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Reviewed by Josep Ausensi
Universitat Pompeu Fabra

This monograph presents a comprehensive analysis of what the authors call *property concept sentences* (1), after Dixon (1982) and Thompson (1989), particularly focusing on the cross-linguistic variation that arises from expressing such property concepts. More specifically, *property concept sentences* refer to cross-linguistic parallels of English copular sentences in which a property concept expressed by an adjective is predicated of some entity, as in (1a). In addition, *property concept lexemes* refer to lexemes from which property concepts are derived, i.e. *intelligent* in (1a). Although in English property concepts are generally expressed non-verbally (1a) by means of a copula, other languages express them by means of possessive sentences as the English equivalent in (1b), this being the default mechanism if not the only one in these languages.

(1) a. Tom is intelligent.
b. Tom has intelligence.

Francez and Koontz-Garboden (FKG, henceforth) undertake to explain why such variation should exist across and within languages, namely why languages differ in how property concepts are expressed and more specifically what determines whether property concept sentences are possessive or not. The hypothesis explored in accounting for such cross-linguistic variation is summarized on what the authors call the Lexical Semantic Hypothesis which states that how property concept sentences are expressed will depend upon the semantics of the lexeme that codifies such property concepts. For a cross-linguistic difference in this respect consider how English and Spanish differ when expressing the concept of *thirsty/thirst*: whereas English employs non-verbal mechanisms, Spanish instead expresses the same concept by means of possessive sentences.

(2) a. John is thirsty.
b. *Juan tiene sed.*
Juan have.PRS.3SG thirst
'John is thirsty'

A natural question that arises from observing such variation cross-linguistically is whether employing possessive sentences or non-verbal forms to express property concepts supposes that the semantics of such sentences be different or instead they display the same semantics (at some level of abstraction) and only differ in terms of their morphology and syntax. In this respect, FKG note that there are two different views, which they call the uniformity and the transparency view. The uniformity view (figuring in Ramchand 2008, Son and Svenonius 2008, Embick 2009) claims that while there are clear differences in the morphophonology cross-linguistically, such differences do not suppose an alteration of semantics. Instead, the transparency view, the one adopted by FKG, is basically summarized in the claim that "all morphosyntactic variation is semantically consequential" (FKG p. 7). Roughly put, in contrast to the uniformity view, the transparency approach (Talmy 1985; Chierchia 1998; Koontz-Garboden 2009, 2014) holds that variation in form supposes a difference in semantics. Thus, adopting a transparency approach, FKG argue that the differences in the structure of property concept sentences across languages are a direct consequence of the lexical semantics of the lexemes that codify such property concepts, as it will be discussed below.

Chapter 2 presents a detailed description of the area of study on which the monograph focuses, i.e. property concept sentences and property concept lexemes, from a cross-linguistic perspective taking into consideration how such concepts are expressed in languages such as Spanish, English, German, Ulwa, Hausa (Chadic language), Huitoto (Huitotoan language of Colombia) or Bisa (a Mande language spoken in northern Ghana and southern Burkina Faso). As FKG note, there is both intra and cross-linguistic variation whether property sentences are formed by employing possessive sentences or not. This contrast is seen in languages such as Spanish in which nominally encoded property concepts such as *sueño* 'sleep' are expressed by means of possessive sentences, whereas adjectival ones *alto* 'tall' are formed non-verbally, by means of a copula.

(3) a. *El niño tiene sueño.*
The.M.SG kid.M have.PRS.3SG sleep
'The kid is sleepy'
b. *El niño es alto.*
The.M.SG kid.M be.PRS.3SG tall.M
'The kid is tall'

In contrast, in languages such as English, property concepts expressed by possessive sentences are more limited since, as FKG note, they are highly marked since in this language non-verbal mechanisms are the default way to express them, as shown in (4). This contrasts with languages such as Ulwa (5) in which possessive strategies are the primary mechanism to form nearly every property concept sentence.

(4) a. I'm hungry vs. I have hunger.
b. I'm tall vs. ??I have height/tallness. (FKG p. 23)

(5) *yang as-ki-na minisih-ka.*
1SG shirt-1SG.POSS dirty-3SG.POSS
'My shirt is dirty.' (from FKG, p. 31, taken from Green 2004: asna)

This chapter thus provides a thorough overview of the fact that expressing property concepts by means of possessive sentences is a rather common phenomenon which is found in many different and unconnected languages.

Chapter 3 lays out the hypothesis that a property concept sentence will be possessive or not depending upon the lexical semantics of the property concept lexeme. Roughly put, whether a property concept sentence will be possessive or not is a direct consequence of whether property concept lexemes are individual-characterizing or quality-denoting. This is formalized as The Lexical Semantic Variation Hypothesis (from Francez and Koontz-Garboden 2015):

(6) **The Lexical Semantic Variation Hypothesis:** Possessive predicating property concept lexemes are quality denoting and non-possessive predicating property concept lexemes are individual characterizing. (FKG p. 37)

FKG connect quality-denoting lexemes with possessive predication, since they argue that, intuitively speaking, if we take *wisdom* to be a property concept denoting the quality wisdom, then if this property concept is predicated of an individual (7a), this is not a paraphrase of a property concept sentence as in (7b). FKG argue then that the possessive sentence in (7c) is actually the paraphrase of the property concept sentence in (7b), expressed adjectivally.[1]

(7) a. Krishna is wisdom.
b. Krishna is wise
c. Krishna has wisdom (from FKG p. 38)

In the remainder of the chapter, FKG present their theoretical model of qualities (as developed in Francez and Koontz-Garboden 2015) which, adopting the approach by Link (1983) to mass nouns, they analyze qualities as a type of mass denotations; this is further explored in Chapter 6, as it will be discussed below.

Chapter 4 aims to show that the transparency view, the one adopted in the present monograph, is superior to the uniformity one when accounting for cross-linguistic differences in expressing property concepts as the latter leads to, as FKG claim (p. 58), "significant loss of generalization." In this chapter the authors thus consider two case studies from Ulwa and Malayalam, the Dravidian language, in order to argue in favor of a transparency approach, namely that differences in the lexical semantics of property concept lexemes are what determine whether property concept sentences are possessive or not. The authors argue, drawing on data from these case studies, that differences in morphophonology are, at least in some instances, determined by the lexical semantics of the property concept lexemes, as different semantics cause a variation in form.

Chapter 5 explores more deeply the hypothesis defended in the monograph, namely that property concept lexemes are either quality denoting (*wisdom*) or characterize individuals (*wise*) and the consequences that such hypothesis may have on the restrictions that

[1] FKG note that whereas (7c) is clearly not truth conditionally equivalent to (7b), it is certainly a paraphrase of it.

certain parts of speech may be subject to. In this respect, FKG aim to show that this hypothesis can help in understanding better the connection between meaning and the nature of parts of speech. FKG argue that while property concept lexemes characterizing individuals can be realized either as nouns or adjectives across languages, quality-denoting lexemes are never realized as adjectives, as adjectives are always individual-characterizing. Roughly put, and as FKG (p. 77) note, this predicts that whereas there can be nouns that can have the equivalent meaning of *wise* in English, there are no languages in which adjectives are quality-denoting, i.e. there are no adjectives that have the equivalent meaning of *wisdom* in English across languages. In this respect, FGK draw on Basaá (Bantu language spoken in Cameroon) in order to provide evidence that this is indeed the case, as in this language property concept lexemes characterizing individuals can be realized as nouns. The claims put forward by FKG predict then that adjectives are always individual-characterizing, whereas nouns can differ in denoting qualities or characterizing individuals across languages.

Chapter 6 is devoted to exploring the linguistic consequences that result from analyzing qualities as a type of mass denotations, adopting the algebraic approach by Link (1983), which is the main focus of Chapter 3. In this chapter FKG show that qualities do behave as a type of mass nouns when subject to prototypical mass diagnostics, since they have in common with ordinary mass nouns the fact that they are mereologically ordered. These diagnostics include not tolerating pluralization (8a), non-acceptability with numerals (8b) or possibility to appear in partitive constructions (8c).

(8) a. ?courages, beauties, hungers vs. tables, chairs, cars.
b. ?each/every courage, beauty, hunger vs. each/every table, chair, car.
c. A lot of courage/anger/weight vs. ?A lot of table/chair/car.

(adapted from FKG p. 104 - 6)

However, KFG show that qualities crucially differ from ordinary mass nouns in some environments, one being that *wh*-exclamatives with either plural countable nouns and standard mass nouns cannot yield interpretations stating that there is some contextually significant amount of *x*, whereas quality nouns do have amount readings in this sense.[2]

(9) a. What dogs sandy has! $\neq$ Sandy has so many dogs.
b. What water the Aegean has! $\neq$ How much water the Aegean has!

(10) a. What courage Kim has! $\equiv$ Kim has so much courage!
b. What wisdom Kim has! $\equiv$ Kim has so much wisdom!

(adapted from FKG P. 122 - 3)

KFG argue that this difference between ordinary mass nouns and quality mass nouns is a consequence of the fact that quality mass nouns are preordered by size. Roughly put, property concept lexemes denoting qualities denote a scale resulting by the preorder $\leq$. Thus, mass nouns differ from quality nouns in lacking such a scale, and therefore this results in mass nouns not being able to yield amount readings with exclamatives.

[2]Other environments in which quality nouns and ordinary mass nouns differ include behavior under modification such as *big*, *huge* or *major*, with *a certain* modifier or with *such*.

In conclusion, this monograph is an essential contribution to the literature on property concepts as it is the first study that lays the groundwork for the cross-linguistic variation that arises from expressing such concepts. In this respect, this monograph is a groundbreaking work since it is the first piece of research to recognize the fact that property concept sentences are commonly expressed by means of possessive sentences across a wide range of languages. Drawing on data from several and unrelated languages, FKG argue that whether a property concept sentence is expressed by means of possessive strategies or not is a direct consequence of the lexical semantics of the property concept lexemes: only quality denoting lexemes (*wisdom*) determine that property concept sentences be expressed possessively both cross-linguistically and intra-linguistically, whereas those which characterize individuals (*wise*) will be expressed non-verbally, by means of a copula. Thus, this monograph provides strong evidence in favor of the transparency approach, in that it shows that differences in morphology and syntax are due to differences in semantics in the case of property concept sentences.

Lastly, the monograph paves the way for future research to better understand the connection of semantics and the nature of parts of speech. In this respect, FKG show that whereas lexemes characterizing individuals can be realized as either nouns or adjectives, lexemes which denote qualities are never realized as adjectives, as adjectives are shown to be always individual-characterizing across languages. Although the monograph focuses on property concept lexemes expressed either nominally or adjectivally, it does not account for the fact that property concept lexemes are also expressed verbally across languages. FGK acknowledge this and even though they leave it for further research, they presume that property concept lexemes expressed verbally should resemble adjectival property concept lexemes in being restricted in a similar way.

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