

Adverbial readings of adjectives Berit Gehrke (HU Berlin)

Krifka (1990) observed an ambiguity for sentences like (1).

- (1) Four thousand ships passed through the lock last year.

The first reading, which he labels ‘object-related’, is the one that any theory of quantification can handle straightforwardly: there are 4.000 ships and these passed through the lock. Under the second, ‘event-related’, reading, on the other hand, there are 4.000 events of ships passing through the lock (and possibly fewer than 4.000 ships if some of these passed through more than once). This reading is harder to account for since the quantifier on the NP appears to be quantifying not over the objects involved but over the event associated with the verb phrase. Krifka proposes that under this reading the quantifier on the (underlying) object, a measure function, induces a measure function on the event.

In this talk, I turn to a similar effect of NP-internal adjectival modifiers and show that when the right relation holds between participant individuation and event individuation, one can use adjectival modifiers of participant nouns to seemingly ‘adverbially’ modify event descriptions. In particular, I will be concerned with frequency adjectives (2) and with so-called external modification in VP idioms (3) (from Ernst 1981), which both allow adverbial paraphrases.

- (2) Marta wrote frequent letters to her grandma.
~ Frequently, Marta wrote letters to her grandma.
- (3) Carter doesn’t have an economic leg to stand on.
~ Economically, Carter doesn’t have a leg to stand on.

In the first part of the talk, I will outline the analyses in Gehrke & McNally (2014) and Gehrke & McNally (2019), which situate the discussed use of FAs as well as the phenomenon of external modification in idioms within the family of semantic incorporation constructions. In the latter paper, we generalise semantic incorporation to all verb-argument combinations, separating descriptive content composition from the composition of reference-related components of meaning.

In the second part of the talk (work in progress), I will address facts discussed in Coppock & Beaver (2015) concerning exclusive adjectives like *only*. Coppock & Beaver observe that *only*-modification of an argument of some verbs, but not of others, gives rise to what they label an ‘anti-uniqueness effect’, in addition to the ‘determinate’ reading that *only* regularly has (4).

- (4) a. Ann didn’t give the only talk.
(i) There was only one talk and Ann didn’t give it. *determinate*
(ii) Not only Ann gave an invited talk (there were other invited talks). *anti-uniqueness*
b. Ann didn’t see the only invited talk.
~ There was only one talk and Ann didn’t give it. *only determinate*

I will explore under what circumstances the anti-uniqueness reading arises with argumental *only* and compare this to the two other case studies above.

References

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