Differential coding in property words: A typological study

Jingting Ye

Leipzig University

jingting.ye@studserv.uni-leipzig.de

This paper provides a systematic large-scale typological study on differential coding in property words, which is also known as "split adjectives" (Wetzer 1992, 1996, Stassen 1997) or "adjective classes" (Dixon 2004). Differential coding in property words is shown by either structural coding (e.g. relativizer, copula) or inflectional potential (e.g. gender, case). For example, in Cavineña, adjectives are divided into two subclasses: attributive adjectives and predicative adjectives, as illustrated in (1).

(1) Cavineña (Pano-Tacanan, South America)
   a. *badi   nana*
      moon   young
      'new moon' (Guillaume 2008: 469)
   b. *wika arida=ke*
      hook big=REL
      'the big hook' (Guillaume 2008: 360)

AG 4

In particular, I have chosen 28 property concepts as semantic targets and investigated their morpho-syntactic behaviour in both the attributive and predicative position by consulting grammatical descriptions and dictionaries. The sample consists of 50 geographically and genealogically diverse languages from all six macro-areas of the world. In total, I have collected data consisting of 232 constructions and 6496 data points.

Aiming at finding universal tendencies, I have built a semantic map for property concepts based on linguistic forms with the Multidimensional Scaling Model (Croft & Poole 2008; Wälchli 2010). In general, the euclidean distance between property concepts in the semantic map represents the formal similarities of property words in languages. The closer two property concepts are represented in the semantic map, the more likely they are coded in similar constructions in my database. The clustering displayed in the semantic map correlates with their coding preferences. By and large, in the semantic map, property concepts on the left tend to display nominal inflection and/or predicative structural coding, while property concepts on the right tend to show verbal inflection and/or attributive structural coding. Theoretically, the semantic map represents the universal conceptual space of property concepts, in which a cut-off line can be drawn for each language.

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