

Adjectives denoting lack of property lack degree semantics

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Scalarity of adjectives has been a topic of a large discussion so far, cf. (Kennedy & McNally 2005; Kearns 2007; Kennedy 2007; Bochnak 2013; Morzycki 2015) but theories of scalarity have been elaborated based on a relatively small set of languages — mostly European ones. In my talk, I will show empirical evidence from several languages indicating that some semantic classes of adjectives which are scalar in European languages tend to lack scalar semantics crosslinguistically. In particular, I will discuss adjectives describing the lack of a certain property ('empty', 'blind' etc.) which I will refer to as (semantically) caritive adjectives. The data come from my own fieldwork on five languages: Tomo Kan (< Dogon), Natio (< Gur), Hill Mari, Udmurt and Moksha (< Finno-Ugric).

In Hill Mari, the most widespread degree adverbial is *piš*. Its meaning is ambiguous between 'very' and 'absolutely' and it is compatible both with open-scale (1) and closed-scale (2) adjectives. However, not all closed-scale adjectives allow modification by *piš*. In such cases, the only felicitous interpretation is the one where the whole proposition is modified but not the adjectival scale itself (3).

- (1) *Vas'a piš toša.* 'Vasya is very thin'.
 (2) *Ti küer piš järkeškä.* 'This stone is perfectly round'.
 (3) *Vas'a piš arã.* 'Indeed, Vasya is sober!/*Vasya is absolutely sober'.

In my talk, I will argue that adjectives like 'sober' in Hill Mari lack scalar semantics and are crucially different from adjectives like 'round'. Adjectives of both types encode lexically closeness to a standard; however, I argue that the crucial difference between the two sets of adjectives is that only adjectives of the latter type are caritive adjectives — that is, they encode absolute lack of a property and therefore are not subject to any degree modification.

I will also show that adjectives of this class tend to lack scalar semantics cross-linguistically. For example, in Tomo Kan, an underdescribed Dogon language, scalarity can be identified in comparative constructions. I argue that Tomo Kan adjectives are inherently comparative and are able to project standards of comparison without any additional comparative markers. However, semantically caritive adjectives consistently do not project standards of comparison. In my talk, I will try to bring together typological data, formal semantics and lexical typology. In particular, I will provide a functional explanation of the fact that some adjectives denoting age ('old', 'worn-out') share many properties of caritive adjectives. I will also discuss different language-specific diagnostics used to identify scalar properties of caritive adjectives in languages of my sample.

References: Bochnak, M. R. (2013). The non-universal status of degrees: Evidence from Washo. *Proceedings of the North East Linguistic Society (NELS)* 42, 79–92. Kearns, K. (2007). Telic senses of deadjectival verbs. *Lingua* 117, 26–66. Kennedy, C. (2007). Vagueness and grammar: The semantics of relative and absolute gradable adjectives. *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 30(1), 1–45. Kennedy, C. & McNally, L. (2005). Scale structure, degree modification, and the semantics of gradable predicates. *Language*, 81 (2), 345–381. Morzycki, M. (2015) Modification.