

Variation in the lexical semantics of adjectives and their crosslinguistic kin

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Workshop description

Semantic theories of gradability and comparison (e.g., Kamp 1975; Cresswell 1977; Klein 1980 and many following) have been developed based on data from a very small sample of languages – almost exclusively English and German. Recent work extending such theories from a crosslinguistic perspective (e.g., Kennedy 2007; Beck et al. 2010; Bochnak 2015) has shown that translationally equivalent expressions do not always exhibit the same entailment behaviors, and can additionally have different morphosyntactic properties (Francez & Koontz-Garboden 2017). These findings therefore present new facts that theoreticians have sought to tie together: In some cases through the positing of crosslinguistic semantic differences with i) some languages lacking a degree semantics (e.g., Washo, Bochnak 2015); and ii) some gradable expressions built on lexical items that have a mass noun semantics (Francez & Koontz-Garboden 2017). These proposals contrast with degree-relation or context-dependent individual-characterizing semantics assigned to adjectives in more familiar languages.

This workshop aims to provide a forum for work that pushes the crosslinguistic agenda in the semantics of adjectives, their crosslinguistic non-adjectival equivalents, and the syntax and semantics of constructions of gradability and comparison in which they appear, with the specific aim of identifying variation in this domain. The selected contributions address aspects of this agenda in addition to the following specific questions tied to it: Are all degreeless languages alike, or are there different kinds of degreelessness (cf. Deal & Hohaus 2019)? Are all “degree-ful” languages alike, or are there semantically consequential, crosslinguistic differences in the kinds of degrees a language might have (whether as portions, as in Francez & Koontz-Garboden, degrees, states, or as something else)? What is the semantic relationship between adjectives in familiar languages and translationally equivalent non-adjectival expressions? Do adjectives (e.g., *wise*, as argued by Menon & Pancheva (2014) have the kinds of meaning observed transparently in possessive constructions of the kind discussed by Francez & Koontz-Garboden 2017 (e.g., *have wisdom*)? How do the meanings of gradable stative verbs (e.g., *love*, *hate*, etc.) relate to the meanings of adjectives? Are they built on a common ontology, as argued by Baglini (2015)? What drives variation in the adjectival domain in languages with and without this category? Do languages exhibit semantic differences or is the observed variation merely the result of different realizations of the same functional material (Menon & Pancheva 2014)?

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