Ryan Walter Smith/Andrew-Kootz Garboden/Jens Hopperdietzel

Inchoativization across languages

Morphology vs. type-shift

Languages differ with respect to the relationship between stative property concept lexemes (henceforth: PCLs) and words describing changes of state (henceforth: COS). In labile languages, there is no morphophonological difference between PCLs expressing a stative meaning and lexemes expressing COS semantics. This is illustrated by Mandarin in (1) (Tham 2013), in which a rate adverbial like *fast*, in combination with a stative predicate, gives rise to a COS meaning (1b). In the absence of a rate adverbial or other material selecting a dynamic event predicate, no COS meaning is present (1a). Lability is not attested in all languages: for example, in Japanese, stative PCLs do not have a COS meaning in the presence of a rate adverbial, and are unacceptable in their presence. Instead, Japanese requires the use of a verb derivationally related to the PCL to express COS (2). Crucially, such overt derivational morphology is absent in languages like Mandarin that show state/COS lability.

We propose an analysis of lability in terms of type shifting: in languages with no overt inchoative morphology, a type-shifting operation introducing inchoative semantics applies where type-mismatches would occur. Together with a Blocking Principle (cf. Chierchia 1998), this explains why COS meaning in labile languages only arises in certain grammatical contexts and why such type-shifting is in complementary distribution with inchoative morphology cross-linguistically. Our analysis thus improves on previous accounts, as it makes a testable cross-linguistic prediction: languages without inchoative morphology, and only these, allow stative verbs to shift to a COS meaning in appropriate contexts.

On our analysis, there is no morpheme, either overt or covert, encoding COS semantics in labile languages. Instead, state/COS lability arises via a type-shifting operation that applies to stative verbs and returns an event predicate (3). This operation which we term Inchoative Shift takes a predicate of states, existentially closes the state argument, and introduces a BECOME relation between an event and the state. Following much work in the type-shifting literature (cf. Partee & Rooth 1983 et seq.), Inchoative Shift applies only as a last resort mechanism to repair local type mismatches. This property of type-shifting explains the restriction of COS readings with stative predicates to cases where the VP would serve as an argument of material that only compose with eventive predicates, e.g. rate adverbs, as such composition would fail in the absence of a type-shift. In the absence of a function demanding an eventive argument, no type mismatch arises, Inchoative Shift does not apply, and COS semantics is absent.

The type-shifting perspective on coercion also lends itself to an explanation for why such a type shift is available in labile languages, but not in non-labile languages: the latter possess overt morphology expressing COS semantics, as (4) shows, while labile languages do not. This is analogous to Chierchia's (1998) explanation for the availability of the ∃ and ɩ typeshifters in Mandarin, which lacks determiners that would otherwise express such meanings, but not in English, which makes use of a and the instead. We can thus extend Chierchia's Blocking Principle to account for blocking effects with type-shifting outside of the nominal domain.

In our talk, we elaborate on further constraints on Inchoative Shift, including its restriction to verbal predicates (cf. state/COS lability is found with verbal PCLs; Koontz-Garboden et al. 2023) and the sensitivity of the Blocking Principle to the structural complexity of inchoative expressions (cf. periphrastic inchoatives do not block Inchoative Shift (5); cf. Katzir 2007). More generally, our talk highlights that the source of COS semantics varies across languages (Matthewson et al. 2015).

Examples

(1) Mandarin
 a. *wo   de toufa hen   chang.*
    1SG DE hair   very   be.long
    'My hair is long.'

 b. *wo de toufa chang de hen kuai.*
    1SG DE hair   be.long DE very fast
    'My hair **gets long** very fast.'

(2) Japanese
 a. *kawa-ga   #(hayaku) hiro-i.*
    river-NOM   quickly   be.wide-PRS
    'The river is #(quickly) wide.'

 b. *kawa-ga   hayaku hiro-**gar**-i.*
    river-NOM   quickly be.wide-PRS
    'The river is #(quickly) widening.'

(3) **Inchoative Shift**
 For a verbal constituent V of type <s,t>, SHIFT(V) = λe.∃s[BECOME(e,s) ∧ V(s)]

(4) **Generalized Blocking Principle with structural alternatives**
 For any type-shifting operator τ and any X: ∗τ(X) if there is an expression Y such that Y is at most as complex as X and [[Y]] = [[τ(X)]]

(5) Mandarin
 *wo de toufa **bian**   chang   le.*
 1SG DE hair   become be.long   PFV
 'My hair got longer.'

References

Chierchia, Gennaro (1998): Reference to kinds across languages. In: Natural Language Semantics 6, pp. 339-405.

Katzir, Roni (2007): Structurally definied alternatives. In: Linguistics and Philosophy 30, pp 669-690.

Koontz-Garboden, Andrew/Hanink, Emily/Hopperdietzel, Jens et al. (2023): State/change of state lability and the meaning of verbhood. Ms, University of Manchester.

Matthewson, Lisa/Quinn, Heidi/Talagi, Lynsey (2015): Inchoativity meets the perfect time span: The Niuean perfect. In: Lingua 168, pp. 1-36.

Partee, Barbara/Rooth, Mats (1983): Generalized conjunction and type ambiguity. In: Bäuerle, Rainer/Schwarze, Christoph/von Stechow, Arnim (eds.): Meaning and use, and interpretation of language. Berlin: deGruyter, pp. 361-383.

Tham, Shiao-Wei (2013): Change of state verbs and result state adjectives in Mandarin Chinese. In: Journal of Linguistics 49(3), pp. 647-701.

Contact information

Smith, Ryan Walter

University of Manchester

ryan.smith-3@manchester.ac.uk

Koontz-Garboden, Andrew

University of Manchester

andrewkg@manchester.ac.uk

Hopperdietzel, Jens

University of Cologne

jens.hopperdietzel@uni-koeln.de