

The Aspectual Uniformity of Evaluative Adjectives

Area of Inquiry: the characterization of the lexical aspect evaluative adjectives (EAs) (e.g. *brave*, *smart*, *rude*) has been a puzzle since Lakoff (1966), Partee (1977), and Dowty (1979) identified EAs as the lone adjective class appearing to instantiate a genuine ambiguity between stative and eventive predications.

On the one hand, EAs in the present simple ((1a)) are stative and they pass standard diagnostics classifying them as individual-level predicates (Carlson 1977).

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| (1) | a. Eva is rude | = Stative: individual-level predication |
| | b. Eva is being rude | = Eventive: activity predication |
| | c. ?What Eva did was be rude | = Eventive: activity predication |
| | d. Eva was rude to leave | = Eventive: stage-level predication |

On the other, EAs appear in the progressive aspect ((1b)) and in pseudo-clefts ((1c)), which seems to indicate an aspectual shift from a state to an activity. Similarly, EAs can also appear with an infinitive ((1d)), which diminishes the intuitive individual-level notion of inherency or permanency, and relativizes the EA to a single situation or event.

This apparent split between stative/individual-level and eventive/activity/stage-level EA predications is frequently analyzed as coercion from states to events (Stowell 1991; Fernald 1999; Escandell-Vidal & Leonetti 2002; Maienborn 2005, a.o.), or as polysemy (Bennis 2004; Kertz 2006; Landau 2009, a.o.).

Proposal: this talk aims to show that coercion and polysemy are unwarranted in the analysis of the EA example types in (1) because close consideration of EA lexical aspect reveals that it remains stable across them. The proposal here is that all of these examples follow from an EA denotation specifying its lexical aspect as *stative causative*.

Rappaport Hovav & Levin (2000) identify stative causative verbs (e.g. *hum*, *shine*, *stink*) as a class with the seemingly contradictory properties of being aspectually stative while showing signs of eventivity. It will be shown that EAs fit this same pattern, with the additional, interesting, complication of being adjectives rather than verbs.

Analysis Sketch: the pattern in (1) will be proposed to follow from the denotation in (2). In (2) EAs select an individual external argument, two state arguments in a causal relation—making their lexical aspect stative causative—and a propositional complement. In addition, it will be shown that EAs are strong factive predicates. This is represented in (2) as a presupposition of the truth of the propositional argument.

- (2) $\|EA\| = \lambda q \lambda s_2 \lambda s_1 \lambda x$: defined iff $q = 1$. $[EA(x, s_1, s_2, q) \ \& \ CAUSE(s_1, s_2)]$

Beginning with (1a) it will be argued that EAs should not be classified as individual-level predicates. On the intuitive side, EAs will be shown to have an existential reading in every tense and aspect outside of the present simple, so the inference of inherency in (1a) is specific to the present simple. The suggestion here will be that EAs' lack of an existential reading just in the present simple is parallel to eventive verbs also lacking this reading in the present simple (e.g. *run*, *build*, *break*). On the formal side, EAs' lack of a weak existential subject reading will fall under Jäger's (2001) generalization that a weak

existential interpretation of an argument is blocked by presupposition of that argument—not by an individual-level classification.

Turning to (1b), EAs' ability to take the progressive will be argued to follow from the causative component in their meaning, rather than an eventive/activity use. It will be proposed that the progressive operates over causative predicates, and as causatives, EAs take the progressive just as causative verbs do.

By contrast, the appearance of EAs in pseudo-clefts ((1c)) will be argued to be a matter of felicity, rather than well-formedness. In this connection, Dowty (1975) first noted that EA acceptability in pseudo-clefts varies across speakers and specific EAs. Here it is proposed that EAs are relatively acceptable in pseudo-clefts because they are causative and their animate individual argument is generally capable of doing things. The source of the lingering sense of EA incongruity in this structure is that EAs are stative—and not activities—and so they do not entail that the individual argument *did* anything. However, EAs can be felicitous in this structure when the content of the stative relation between individual and proposition is semantically underspecified ((1c)). In contrast, (3) shows that when this relation is specified with an overt infinitive the contradiction between *do*'s requirement for action versus the stativity of the EA produces ungrammaticality.

(3) *What Eva did was be rude to leave

Finally, the existential reading of (1d) is now unproblematic since EAs are no longer classified as individual-level predicates. Here it will be shown that the appearance of infinitive is not exceptional because EAs always entail a complement proposition, even when null ((1a-c)).

Upshot: EAs are an interesting case study in the context of coercion and polysemy because they highlight how intuitions of ambiguity can follow from a unified lexical entry, underspecification, and independent factors. The talk will conclude with discussion of the nature of semantic content regarding the stative/eventive divide, supporting the position that truth-conditions are semantically underdetermined.

Selected References

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