Stereotypes, Desires, and Constructions

This paper develops a semantic analysis couched in the Construction Grammar framework of the three constructions illustrated in (1), which, for convenience, I call the subject-oriented adverb construction \textit{(so-adv-cxt)}, the “Adj. + to Inf.” construction \textit{(adj-to-inf-cxt)}, and the “Adj. + of NP” construction \textit{(adj-of-np-cxt)}.

\begin{enumerate}
\item a. Stupidly, John danced like a fool. \textit{(so-adv-cxt)}
\item b. John was stupid to dance like a fool. \textit{(adj-to-inf-cxt)}
\item c. It was stupid of John to dance like a fool. \textit{(adj-of-np-cxt)}
\end{enumerate}

The proposed analysis accounts for the intuitive semantic equivalence of the three constructions (Jackendoff 1972, Tenny 2000), and two known semantic puzzles concerning them:

\textbf{Entailment Puzzle:} The three constructions all involve three semantic components: (i) an individual \textit{a} (John in (1a-c)), (ii) a property \textit{P} \textsubscript{1} that describes a mental characteristic/disposition (stupid), and (iii) another property \textit{P} \textsubscript{2} which typically describes an action (dance like a fool). While they entail \textit{P} \textsubscript{2} (a), they do not entail \textit{P} \textsubscript{1} (a) (note that from (1a-c) we cannot conclude that John is a kind person). It is not feasible to attribute this entailment pattern to a coerced stage-level interpretation of \textit{P} \textsubscript{1}, as it can be shown, with a number of diagnostics, that \textit{P} \textsubscript{1} in the three constructions denotes an individual-lever property rather than a stage-level property (Kertz 2006).


\begin{enumerate}
\item a. #John \{wanted/intended\} [to dance like a fool].
\item b. #Ken wanted it to be stupid of John to dance like a fool.
\end{enumerate}

Embedding of a so-adv-cxt results in an awkward sentence, but this may well be because of a syntactic reason.

\begin{enumerate}
\item a. (?)John wanted to, stupidly, dance like a fool.
\item b. (?)Ken wanted John to, stupidly, dance like a fool.
\end{enumerate}

I propose that the meaning shared by the three constructions is along the lines of: ‘\textit{P} \textsubscript{2} \textit{a}, and \textit{P} \textsubscript{2} is one of the properties that are expected to be true of any \textit{x} such that \textit{P} \textsubscript{1} \textit{x}’.

The three constructions are semantically equivalent, except that the adj-to-inf-cxt and adj-of-np-cxt presupposes \textit{P} \textsubscript{2} \textit{a} (Barker 2002), while the so-adv-cxt does not. Using the “presupposition connective” \textit{(preditional; Oshima 2007, Blamey 1986)}, the logical forms of (1a-c) can be given as follows:

\begin{enumerate}
\item a. (1a) \iff \textit{dance-like-a-fool(john)} \land \Box_{sw}[\forall x[(\textit{dance-like-a-fool}(x) \rightarrow \textit{stupid}(x)]]
\item b. (1b), (1c) \iff \Box_{sw}[\forall x[(\textit{d-l-a-f}(x) \rightarrow \textit{stupid}(x))]; \textit{d-l-a-f}(john)]
\end{enumerate}
This analysis correctly predicts that (1a-c) do not entail: ‘John is (actually) stupid’. Also, the fact that the adj-to-inf-cxt and the adj-of-np-cxt cannot be embedded under want, intend, etc. can now be treated as a variant of the phenomenon illustrated in (7):

(7)  
a. It is expected of anyone who dances like a fool to be stupid.  
b. #I wanted it to be expected of anyone who dances like a fool to be stupid.

Whether one’s intention or desire is fulfilled or not is contingent on the state of affairs in the actual world (in the future). On the other hand, whether two properties stand in the law-like relation represented in (3) is not affected by “the way things are”; one cannot make this relation hold or not hold by manipulating the world parameter within the range of epistemically accessible worlds, and in this sense, it is beyond one’s intention/desire. (Note that, the ‘\(P_2(a)\)' component, is presupposed in the adj-to-inf-cxt/adj-of-inf-cxt and thus cannot be interpreted as (part of) the object of intention/desire.)

The paradigm of the three constructions is amenable to the Construction Grammar approach, because their meaning cannot be derived from the meanings of their constituents and regular semantic rules only. I provide formal analyses of the three constructions in the style of Fillmore et al. (in press), part of which is presented below:

(8)  
the “Adj. to Inf.” construction (AP; e.g., wise to leave early):

Selected References