

## A syntax-based analysis of predication

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Adjectives and common nouns are currently assigned the same semantic analysis: both categories are said to denote sets of individuals (type  $\langle e, t \rangle$ ). We will assume instead the basic postulate of property theory (Chierchia (1982,1985), Chierchia & Turner (1988)), namely the existence of two basic types of entities: individuals and properties or, as Chierchia puts it, 'predicable and non predicable individuals'. The main proposal to be made in the paper is that adjectives denote properties (viewed as primitive entities, *not* as sets of individuals), whereas (number marked) common nouns basically denote sets of individuals. Correlated with this distinction, we will propose the existence of two distinct operations of predication: (i) an entity is a member of a set of entities and (ii) a property is localized in an entity. Our hypothesis will be shown to provide an account of a wide range of phenomena: (i) the behavior of names of profession in Romance copula sentences, which will be extended to bare NP's of the type *fils d'avocat* 'son of lawyer' (section 2); (ii) the contrast between *ce* 'this/that [one]' and *il/elle* 'he/she' in French (section 3); (iii) the relation between predication and information structure (section 4).

### 1. Nominal vs Adjectival Predicates

The currently assumed hypothesis that adjectives and common nouns share the same type of denotation predicts that (i) adjectives can appear in those argument positions in which common nouns can be bare, and (ii) common nouns consistently appear bare in predicate position. Both predictions are contradicted by the data:

- (1) a. I saw students.  
b. \*I saw blue.
- (2) a. John is handsome.  
b. \*John is boy.

Given our claim that adjectives and common nouns have distinct semantic types, the contrast shown in (1) can be explained by saying that argument-positions may host elements denoting sets of individuals (type  $\langle e, t \rangle$ ), hence the possibility of bare plurals in English (see also Romance languages other than French), but not properties, hence the exclusion of adjectives. Quite interestingly, French adjectives preceded by *du/de la*, which are otherwise comparable to English bare nouns from the point of view of their distribution (Bosveld-de Smets (1997, 2003)), are allowed to occupy argument positions:

- (3) J'ai vu du bleu 'I saw DU blue'.

We will argue that the grammaticality of examples of the type in (3) is due to the internal structure of *du*-headed expressions: the adjective has been nominalized by the definite article (see Chierchia's DOWN operator) and *de* has shifted the resulting kind to the corresponding set of realizations of the kind (see Chierchia's (1998) UP operator).

As to the contrast in (2), it can be explained by assuming two distinct operations of predication, corresponding to the distinction between properties *vs* sets of individuals: (i) copula sentences built with adjectives are true iff the property denoted by the adjective is localized in the individual denoted by the subject DP; (ii) copula sentences built with nouns in the predicate position are true iff the individual denoted by the subject DP belongs to the set of individuals denoted by the nominal predicate. In order to account for the ungrammaticality of (2)b we need to assume that (i) nominal projections can denote sets of individuals only if they are headed by Number (Krifka (2003), Farkas & de Swart (2003), de Swart et al. (2004), *inter alia*) and (ii) the singular indefinite article is a realization of [+sing] Number.

## 2. Bare singular nouns in predicate position

In certain languages, a restricted class of common nouns, e.g., names of professions (*professeur*, *avocat*), titles (*prince*), hobbies (*alpiniste*), functions (*ministre*), occupations (*étudiant*) and status (SDF 'unemployed'), can be used 'bare', i.e., lack the indefinite article when used as predicates (Laca & Tasmowski (1994), Matushansky & Spector (2004), deSwart & alii (2004)):

(4) Jean est danseur. 'John is dancer'

Our account will be based on the hypothesis that the use of bare singular nouns in predicate position is possible only for those common nouns that may denote properties. We will furthermore explain why modified nouns may denote complex properties only if they denote properties of events (e.g., *Jean est mauvais danseur* 'John is [a] bad dancer', meaning 'John dances poorly', see Larson (1998)). Otherwise, modified nouns, even names of professions, denote sets of individuals, and as such must be accompanied by the indefinite article in Romance languages (*Jean est \*(un) bon avocat* 'John is \*(a) good lawyer'). Our account will be extended to examples of the type in (5):

(5) Jean est fils d'avocat. 'John is son of lawyer'

## 3. Personal pronouns vs *ce* 'this, that [one], it' in French

Consider next the paradigm in (6):

(6) Marie est entrée. 'Mary entered the room'  
a. Elle était belle. 'She was good-looking'  
a'. ?\* Elle était une belle femme. 'She was a good-looking woman'  
b. \*C'était belle. 'It was good-looking'  
b'. C'était une belle femme. 'It/that was a gd-looking woman'

We will argue that the paradigm in (6) can be explained by assuming that French *ce* ('this/that [one], it', to be kept distinct from another *ce*, which refers to an event and translates as 'that' in English, e.g., *C'est beau* 'That's beautiful') is unable to serve as a localizer for a property, but instead requires the second type of predication: in order to verify the predication we must check whether the discourse referent introduced by *ce* belongs to the set of individuals denoted by the predicate. Hence the exclusion of adjectives and the possibility of singular indefinites ((6)b vs (6)b'). Personal pronouns are subject to the inverse requirement, hence the pattern in (6)a'.

## 4. Bare singular nouns in predicate position and information structure

The examples in (7) show that the choice between the two types of predication may be driven by information structure: one or the other type of predication relation is used depending on whether the predicate or the subject is focused.

(7) a. Question: Et Marie, qu'est-ce qu'elle est? 'And Mary, what is she?'  
Answer: Danseuse/\*Une danseuse 'Dancer / \*a dancer'  
b. Question: Et Marie, qui est-ce? 'And Mary, who is she?'  
Answer: Une danseuse/ \*Danseuse 'A dancer/ \*dancer'

### References:

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