A language-internal, as opposed to ontological and cognitive, explanation of the formation of utterances
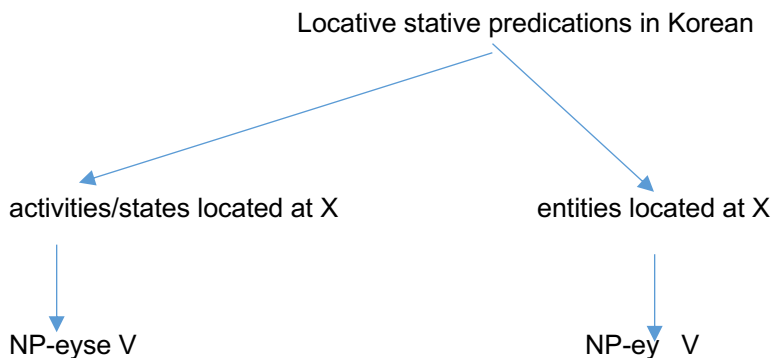
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The study complements the growing literature on the role of ontology in linguistics (Schalley (2019, and other references) by explaining how concepts, i.e. ontological categories, emerge as part of the cognitive system. The study demonstrates that within a language there are at least two levels at which semantic concepts are generated: the level of the lexicon and the level of grammatical structure. Even if the same ontological categories exist at the levels of lexicons, the semantic concepts encoded at the grammatical level may be quite distinct across languages. The case in point is the ontological distinction between events, states, and entities. In many languages the distinction between the three categories is encoded at the lexical level but is not encoded at the grammatical level. In a language in which this distinction is encoded in the grammatical system, speakers must scrutinize the planned utterances for these concepts. In a language in which this distinction is not encoded in the grammatical system, speakers do not have to scrutinize the utterance for such concepts. The evidence for the proposed hypothesis is provided by contrasts between Korean and Western Indo-European languages.

Korean is typologically rare in that it has two stative locative predications whose form depends on the ontological class of the category whose location is predicated. One class combines activities and states and the other consists of entities. The NP below is the head of the locative complement:

Locative stative predications in Korean

activities/states located at X   entities located at X

NP-eyse V   NP-ey   V

If the ontological category whose location is predicated is an ENTITY, the locative complement is marked by the postposition -*ey* (example 1). If the ontological category whose location is predicated consists of STATES or ACTIVITIES, the locative complement is marked by the postposition -*eyse* (example 2), as already noted in Song 2005:114 (see below). The ontological category ACTIVITY or STATE may be represented by a clause (ex. 3), by a verb (ex. 4), or by the mere use of the postposition -*eyse* (ex. 5). The feature that unites states and events in Korean is that both carry some modal values, as opposed to entities that do not carry modal values. In Western Indo-European languages, including English, there exists ontological distinction at the lexical level between activities, states, and entities. There is, however, no formal distinction between clauses predicating the presence of an entity in place X and clauses predicating the presence of an activity or state in place X. Hence, in languages in which the distinction between the two ontological categories is not encoded in the grammatical structure, the speaker's cognitive state ignores this distinction. We can postulate that, in language production, speakers **must** express any concepts that are part of the semantic structure encoded in the grammatical system if these concepts are involved in the situation the speaker conveys. This provides substance to and confirms Jakobson's saying that languages differ not in what they may express but in what they must express.

Examples and references

(1) *hakkyo-ey*   *iss-ta.*
     school-LOC.EN   exist-DECL
     '[He] is at school.' (loc.en: location of an entity)

(2) *hakkyo-eyse*   *no-n-ta.*
     school-LOC.ACT   play-PRS-DECL
     '[He] is playing at school.' (LOC.ACT: location of an activity/state)

(3) *insangkiph-ess-ten*   *umsik-un*   *phulangsu-eyse*   *mek-ess-ten*
     impressive- PST-REL   food-NOM   France- LOC.ACT   eat-PST-REL
     talphayngi   *yoli-ka*   *iss-upni-ta*
     snail   dish-nom   be-HON-DECL
     'The most memorable food is the snail dish that [I] ate in France.'

(4) *ice*   *yeohaeng-ul*   *kkutnay-ko*   *sukso-eyse*   *shil*   *ttae*   . . .
     now   journey-ACC   complete-and   accommodation-LOC.ACT   rest   when
     'When [I] complete a journey and have a rest at the accommodation now, …'

(5) *hakkyo-eyse*   *iss-ta.*
     school-LOC.ACT   exist-DECL
     '[It] takes place at school.'

Schalley, Andrea C. 2019. Ontologies and ontological methods in linguistics. *Language and linguistics compass*, v. 13 Issue 11 https://doi.org/10.1111/lnc3.12356

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