

Title: The cross-linguistic coding of the contrast between 'state of affairs' and 'proposition'
Presentation: Oral presentation

Since Lees 1960 and Vendler 1967, a distinction between two types of clausal meaning has been found useful in the description of a number of linguistic contrasts. Compare for instance the complement contrasts in (1) and (2).

TUKANG BESI (Donohue 1999: 403-404)

- (1) a. No-'ita-'e no -kanalako te osimpu.
 3R-see-3OBJ [3R-steal CORE young.coconut].
 'She saw him stealing the coconut'.
 b. No-'ita-'e *kua* no -kanalako te osimpu.
 3R-see-3OBJ [COMP 3R-steal CORE young.coconut].
 'She saw that he had stolen the coconut'.

TURKISH (Kornfilt 1997: 51)

- (2) a. (Ben)Ahmed -in öl -*me* -sin -den kork -uyor -du -m.
 (I) [Ahmet -GEN die-ANOM-3.SG] -ABLfear -PROG -PAST -1.SG.
 'I was afraid that Ahmet would die' (or: 'I was afraid of Ahmet dying').
 b. (Ben)Ahmed -in öl -*düğ* -ün -den kork -uyor -du -m.
 (I) [Ahmet -GEN die-FNOM -3.SG] -ABLfear -PROG -PAST -1.SG.
 'I was afraid that Ahmet had died'.

The clausal complements in (1a) and (2a) express a 'state of affairs' (also called e.g. 'event' or 'second-order entity'). Arguably, they cannot be evaluated epistemically. As opposed to that, the complements in (1b) and (2b) express a 'proposition' (also called e.g. '(potential) fact' or 'third-order entity'). They can be evaluated epistemically.

The distinction between state of affairs and proposition has recently been invoked in cross-linguistic investigations (Schüle 2000, Cristofaro 2003, Boye *fc.*), and it plays a central role in a typologically-based theory of language, Functional Discourse Grammar (Hengeveld & Mackenzie 2008). However, contrasts like those in (1) and (2) have not yet been subjected to a focused analysis, and a number of issues concerning the distinction between state of affairs and proposition remain unsolved. In particular, it is not clear how exactly the distinction should be defined.

This paper presents a cross-linguistic study of the coding of contrasts like those in (1) and (2). It is based on data from a genetically stratified sample of 100 languages and has four main goals.

1. It gives an overview of the ways in which contrasts describable in terms of the state of affairs-proposition distinction can be coded cross-linguistically.
2. It gives an overview of the contexts in which such contrasts are relevant.
3. It presents data in support of the hypothesis that state of affairs meaning is typologically unmarked with respect to proposition meaning.
4. It proposes a cognitive analysis of state of affairs meaning and proposition meaning which is compatible with the hypothesis concerning typological markedness.

References

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