Liketa is close to, but not almost

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An important issue in the semantics of approximative modifiers like *almost* concerns their possible interpretations when combined with verbs. This talk is an inquiry into the semantics of the phrasal approximative *liketa* found in Appalachian English (Wolfram and Christian, 1976). *Liketa* in (1a) is often paraphrased as *almost* in (1b), and like other approximative modifiers *liketa* has a proximal and polar component to its meaning (2). Since no previous analysis of the form exists, it is compared to English *almost* and German *fast*. I show that the verbal decomposition account of approximative interpretations in Rapp and von Stechow (1999) (R&S) is insufficient. Instead, I argue that *liketa* should be treated as an expression that generates scalar alternatives which are ranked on a Horn scale, following Penka (2005)'s treatment of DP-modifying *almost*. I extend Penka's proposal, and suggest that scalar alternatives generated *liketa* are supplied structure by the verbal aspect of liketa's complement. In this talk, I focus on explaining the interpretation of, *John liketa built that house* where *John approached but did not begin building that house*.

Liketa is syntactically different from *almost*. *Liketa* is a verb rather than an adverb because: It cannot be extraposed, *John died almost/*liketa*. It cannot be a response to polarity questions, *Q:Have you finished eating? A:almost/*liketa*. It can appear in verbal position between Perf heads like a verb in a bi-clausal construction, *John had liketa/*almost have died*. *Liketa* is a raising verb because it can take expletive subjects and a passivized complement, *There had liketa have been men killed in the mines yesterday*. *Liketa*'s structure is in (3). *Liketa* is semantically different from *almost*. (Dowty, 1979) notes that *almost* is ambiguous with accomplishment verbs (4). *Liketa* is not (5). At the same time, *liketa* shares other interpretations with VP-modifying *almost*.

R&S argue for an approach to VP-modifying *almost* based on verbal decompositional and scope. This approach is not extendable to *liketa* because its possible meanings include those associated with *almost* scoping inside a verbal decomposition. That *liketa* has such readings is unexpected, given that its syntax ensures wide scope over any decomposed verb in its complement.

Penka follows Schwarz (2005) in implementing scalar alternatives. She assumes there is a scalar alternative operator ranging over scales of propositions via a restrictor variable. She uses $\approx$ as the restrictor variable and the closeness relation. So *almost* in *Almost 100 people died* has the denotation and truth conditions in (6). She argues that the scale structure is supplied by the sequence of natural numbers and that the restrictor $\approx$ ranges over the set of close by alternatives defined in (6a), assuming a contextually supplied standard deviation of 10% for simplicity.

I propose that alternatives generated by *liketa*, are based on the temporal sequence of aspectual 'chunks' of a given verb. It is reasonable to assume that a verb like *build* has an initial point (INIT) which separates a preparatory period (PREP) from an event process and final result point (RES). Thus, we can assume such aspectual structure generates the following scale, PREP $<$ INIT $<$ RES. So, *John liketa built that house* would generate the set of alternatives in (7). Crucially, *liketa* never allows instantiation of the eventuality of its complement, thus we are left with an event which roughly corresponds to a preparatory period being instantiated in the actual world. I propose the denotation and truth conditions for *liketa* in (8), where events are of type v.

In summary, *liketa* is unambiguous with accomplishments because it requires that the eventuality in its complement doesn't hold. The lack of ambiguity does not stem from scope relative to a decomposed verb. Further, assuming that *liketa* generates scalar alternatives based upon the aspectual class of the verb in its complement generates the correct interpretations yet constrains the set of possible alternatives in a systematic way. The current analysis informs ideas of 'closeness' in approximatives and shows that micro-variation is an insightful tool in semantic analysis.

(1) a. John *liketa* froze to death last night.
b. John *almost* froze to death last night.

(2) a. John came close to X proximal
b. John did not X. polar

(3) $[_{TP}\ Subj_i\ [_{perfP}$ (had) $[_{VP}$ like(ta$_j$) $[_{TP}$ t$_i$ $[_T$ t$_j$ $[_{perfP}$ (have) $[_{VP}\ verb{+}pp\ ]]]]]]$

(4) John almost built that house.
a. *John came close to starting to build that house but he did not.*
b. *John started to build that house but was interrupted and he did not finish.*

(5) John liketa built that house.
a. *John came close to starting to build that house but he did not.*
b. # *John started to build that house but was interrupted and he did not finish.*

(6) $[\![almost_{\approx}]\!] = \lambda w \lambda p_{\langle s,t\rangle}.\ \neg p(w)\ \&\ \exists q\ [q \approx p\ \&\ q(w)]$
a. $\{p \mid p =$ that n people died, $90 < n < 100\}$
b. $\neg$(100 people died) & that n people died, $90 < n < 100\}$

(7) {John was in the preparatory period of building a house,
John initiated building the house,
John finished building the house}

(8) $[\![liketa]\!] = \lambda f_{\langle v,\langle s,t\rangle\rangle} \lambda w.\ \exists v[f(v)(w) = 0\ \wedge\ \exists g_{\langle v,\langle s,t\rangle\rangle}[g \in C\ \wedge\ g(v)(w) = 1]]$
a. $\neg$(John initiated building a house) & John was in the preparatory period of building a house,
PREP $<$ INIT $<$ RES

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