

The Composition of Incremental Change

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Current theories of aspect acknowledge the pervasiveness of verbs of variable telicity, and are designed to account both for why these verbs show such variability and for the complex conditions that give rise to telic and atelic interpretations. Previous work has identified several sets of such verbs, including incremental theme verbs, such as *eat* and *destroy*; degree achievements, such as *cool* and *widen*; and directed motion verbs, such as *ascend* and *descend*. As the diversity in descriptive labels suggests, most previous work has taken these classes to embody distinct phenomena and to have distinct lexical semantic analyses.

In Kennedy and Levin 2008, we suggest that it is possible to provide a unified analysis in which the behavior of all of these verbs stems from a single shared element of their meanings: a function that measures the degree to which an object changes relative to some scalar dimension over the course of an event. Focusing on the case of degree achievements, we claim that such "measure of change" functions are derived from two more basic concepts: an underlying measure function, which we take to be the basic denotation of expressions that are lexicalized in many languages as gradable adjectives, and a general operation mapping basic measure functions into functions which measure the difference between two objects on a scale, which underlies the semantics of comparatives.

The goal of this talk is twofold. First, I will give an overview of the Kennedy and Levin proposal, providing further arguments supporting the link between comparison and scalar change in degree achievements based on cross-linguistic data involving the morphosyntax of change of state verbs and the syntax and semantics of verbal comparatives. Building on these observations, I will then show how the can be extended to the class of English incremental theme verbs by incorporating ideas from Schwarzschild 2006 about the place of measure functions in the nominal projection. I will conclude by discussing some typological implications of the analysis.

References

Kennedy, Christopher and Beth Levin. 2008. 'Measure of change: The adjectival core of verbs of variable telicity'. In McNally, Louise and Christopher Kennedy (eds.), *Adjectives and Adverbs: Syntax, Semantics, Discourse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Schwarzschild, Roger. 2006. The role of dimensions in the syntax of noun phrases. *Syntax* 9:67-110.