

Psych Nouns and the Structure of Predication

The syntactic and semantic construction of stative psychological predicates (love, hate, fear, etc) varies dramatically across languages and poses a challenge for theories of predication. In Scottish Gaelic the structures are particularly intriguing due to (i) the lack of nominative experiencers and (ii) the ubiquitous use of prepositions to mediate the relation between psychological states and their participants. We show how the outlandish syntax of these structures can be captured through a simple theory of predication which sheds new light on the possible range of preposition-like functions in natural language.

Psych-predicates are realised in SG via Ns and As denoting the psychological state itself, together with PP experiencers and PP or NP themes. Type 1 constructions are formed on the basis of the simple verb ‘to be’, while Type 2 are formed on the basis of the copula.

(1) Tha an t-acras orm	(2) Tha gaol agam ort	(3) Is toigh leum coffaidh
Be the hunger on-me	Be love at-me on-you	Cop enjoyment with-me coffee
‘I am hungry.’	‘I love you.’	‘I like coffee.’
<i>Intransitive Type 1</i>	<i>Transitive Type 1</i>	<i>Type 2</i>

We show that Type 2 constructions fall into the class of *Inverse Copular Constructions* (Adger and Ramchand 2003); the apparent object is actually the semantic subject of predication:

- (4) $[_{TP} [_{Pred'} \text{copula } [_{NP} \text{enjoyment with-me}]_i \text{ T } [_{PredP} \text{coffee } t_i]]$

We argue that these constructions involve a Predicative head (the copula) taking as complement a bare (nominalized) property; the prepositional phrase is the complement of the psych noun and expresses a constrained set of relations between the psych state and the DP participant; this constituent raises to Spec TP satisfying EPP. This explains a number of syntactic facts: why the nominal cannot be modified (adjectives modify predicates, not properties); why no adverbial can intervene between the parts of the construction; why a restricted set of prepositions appears.

We show that Type 1 also involves a predicative head. The intransitive cases are simple small clauses interpreted as PredPs (Bowers 1993, Svenonius 1994) with the preposition as head, rather than complement as in Type 2. *be* Merges with T satisfying EPP:

- (5) $[_{TP} \text{be } [_{PredP} [\text{the hunger}] [_{Pred'} \text{on me}]]]$

Transitive Type 1 involves yet another strategy: two PPs follow the psych noun; the first is the experiencer and the second is the theme. This structure can be unified with intransitive Type 1 and also with a different strategy used in the language: a null predicational head with an aspectual complement, headed by a prepositional element. Aspect phrases in SG are headed by what superficially look like prepositions (Adger 1996) selected by the verb ‘to be’. We argue that the preposition *ag* found on the experiencer participant in transitive Type 1 constructions is such an aspectual head. The higher Pred acts as an attractor (a prepositional probe in Kayne 2004’s terms) and causes the head of AspP (*at*) to raise to the head of PredP; The subject of the higher PredP (love) controls a PRO in the lower one:

- (6) $[_{TP} \text{be } [_{PredP} \text{love at+Pred } [_{AspP} \text{me } t_{at} [_{PredP} \text{PRO on you}]]]$

This approach correctly predicts that the psych-nominal can be modified and extracted (since it is a fully fledged subject); that there is a true c-command relationship between the two arguments of the construction (which is confirmed by binding evidence); that the first argument in this construction should always be introduced by a preposition that functions as an aspectual element in nominal and verbal predication.

Scottish Gaelic psychological predications can be given a unified treatment in terms of Pred heads, which makes sense of both the semantic relationships involved and their syntactic properties. In addition, an intriguing typology of prepositional structures emerges: non-specifier PPs in complement position to nouns (Type 2); Ps supporting full predicational small clauses with a ‘subject’ specifier position (Type 1 intransitive); Ps which are more like functional heads, being attracted to a higher predicational probe (Type 1 transitive).

References

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