

Linguistics Seminar Series on

“Natural Language Quantification – Compositionality in Quantifier Phrases and Quantifier Words”

Lecture 2: Indefinites and Universals Decomposed

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Date: October 17, 2012 (Wednesday)

Time: 4:30pm – 6:15pm

Venue: LSK LT2 (Lee Shau Kee Building), Chinese University of Hong Kong

Abstract

Various recent theories of morphology and syntax have converged on the view that there is no demarcation line corresponding to the word level. But formal semantic analyses often take words to be minimal building blocks for the purposes of compositionality.

In the domain of quantification, the cross-linguistically most interesting challenge to the word-based view comes from a small set of particles that participate in building quantifiers of the ‘anybody, somebody’ and ‘everybody’ type on the one hand, and serve as connectives, additive and scalar particles, question markers, and existential verbs on the other.

In the spirit of extending compositionality below the word level, I examine Japanese *ka* and *mo*, Sinhala *də*, Chinese *dou*, and Hungarian *vala/vagy*, *mind*, and *is* as examples of the phenomenon. Are the meanings of these particles highly regular across the varied environments, or are they lexicalized with a variety of different meanings that bear a family resemblance? If they have unitary meanings, are they aided by different silent elements in their different occurrences? Rather than making sweeping generalizations, I strive to keep track and make sense of how the behavior of the particles varies across languages. I will raise analytical possibilities using Boolean semantics, building among others on Gil (1995), Haspelmath (1997), the semantics of alternatives (Kratzer & Shimoyama 2002, Yatsushiro 2009, Slade 2011), and issue-raising (Roelofsen 2012).

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