THE NATURE OF A PREDICATE: THE CASE OF DEPICTIVES

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The structural analysis that best derives the basic properties of depictive constructions, as in (1), is still a matter of debate. The account we propose here is part of a broader theory in which a predicate is necessarily true of a time and place; thus the construction of a syntactic predicate requires a discourse-related functional head, as we discuss below.
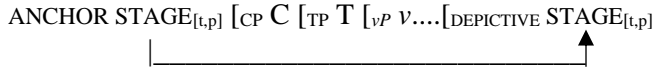

(1) (a) temporal overlap with main event   (Halliday 1967, Geuder 2000, a.o.)
         Jones cut the bread *hot*, #but it was cold at the time.   (from Keshet 2010)
    (b) restriction to stage-level   (Rapoport 1993, Winkler 1997, Simpson 2005, a.o.)
         Mary ate the beans *raw/*big*.

We analyze the depictive predicate as a lexical AP merged with a STAGE functional projection, that is, a discourse element with time and place coordinates, as shown in (2). The composition with this stage is what distinguishes the predicative from the attributive use of an AP.

(2) Depictive predicate = StagePhrase

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              STAGE
            /        \
       STAGE          AP
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(3) Depictive stage identification
    ANCHOR STAGE$_{[t,p]}$ [$_{CP}$ C [$_{TP}$ T [$_{vP}$ v....[$_{DEPICTIVE}$ STAGE$_{[t,p]}$
         |_____↑

In order for the full depictive phrase to be interpreted, the STAGE's time and place coordinates, unspecified at merge, must be defined. This is done via identification by the element of the higher discourse layer that provides the spatio-temporal parameters of the clause, here termed the ANCHOR STAGE (our syntactic implementation of Erteschik-Shir's 1997 Stage Topic). The identification of the depictive stage by the Anchor stage, as sketched in (3), in turn yields the properties in (1):

(4) (a) The time/place of the depictive predicate is identical to the discourse event time/place.
    (b) ANCHOR STAGE's time/place imposes a stage-level interpretation on the depictive.

(5) Syntactic predicate = a θ-assigning phrase true of a time and place, merged with a STAGE.

In our theory, syntactic predicates are defined semantically (Williams 1987), pragmatically, and syntactically, as in (5). An obvious question is raised by *individual-level* predicates, such as those in small clauses (SC): *Jane considers Mary smart*. We propose that *consider* selects a predication whose STAGE head is identified by the SC subject: the SC predicate is thus true of all times and places in which that subject exists. In this way, we also capture the insight of Basilico (2003) without needing to postulate a dedicated category, his pronominal stage topic. Our stage-head view

thus accounts for two different construction, and predicate, types. Identifying the head of all predicate phrases as a discourse-related element also successfully avoids the problems (as noted in Matushansky 2019) of theta- or case-related Pred heads (Bowers 1993, den Dikken 2006).

As for depictives, compared to other analyses, such as complex-predicate (Larson 1991, Pylkkänen 2008, Irimia 2012, a.o.), or small clause (e.g. Bowers 1993, Stowell 1991, a.o.), in our account:

- temporal overlap and the stage-level restriction are derived, rather than stipulated
- the thematic relations among the verb, object, and secondary predicate are accurately represented, as is the adjunct status of the depictive predicate
- the analysis of the depictive predicate follows from a general theory of syntactic predicates

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