When a language codes affectedness

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The purpose of this presentation is to demonstrate that (1) grammatical structures of languages code different meanings, and (2) these meanings are different from inferences about the meaning of a linguistic form that are obtained through the alleged connection between the language form and the extra-linguistic universe.

These two facts require a different theoretical approach to the notion of meaning and a different methodological approach to the discovery of meaning.

Background: The features 'affectedness' and 'affect' are usually linked with grammatical relations and analyzed as semantic property correlated with the objects of transitive verbs (Van Valin 2005: 57) and as potential entailments of the subjects of unaccusative verbs (Perlmutter 1978, Dowty 1991, Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1994). Dixon 2010: 98 considers 'Affect' to be a property of certain verbs, e.g. 'hit', 'burn'.

The question and the hypothesis: Mina has two means of marking the last clause of an episode. The question is what the choice of means codes. The hypothesis is that it codes a distinction between the affected subject and all other subjects.

The larger goal: The study demonstrates that the coding of affectedness is different from the interpretation of the properties of an argument as affected, as has been done in much of the literature so far. The analysis herein (based on recent fieldwork) is quite different from the one in Frajzyngier et al. 2005. The study shows that affectedness in Mina is not a feature shared by objects of transitive verbs and subjects of unaccusative verbs, as often claimed in contemporary literature, but rather is a feature marked by a specific formal means, *m* Verb-*yi*, which codes the following real-world characteristics: changes in the existential status of the subject (e.g. disappearance) (ex. 1); changes in the physical form of the subject (ex. 2); and displacement of the subject (ex. 3a-b). The function coded by the formal means *m* Verb-*yi* is called here 'affectedness predication'. The demonstration of the existence of this type of predication is a contribution to the typology of semantic features that can be coded by the grammatical system of a language.

The argumentation: The affectedness predication can have only one argument, the subject, as evidenced by the use of subject pronouns (ex. 3b). The subject may be controlling or not (ex. 1-3), hence the feature [control] plays no role in the affectedness predication. The verb in the affectedness predication may be inherently intransitive or transitive, hence affectedness is not a correlate of transitivity (ex. 1-4) and for the same reason it is not a passive construction.

An entity that is part of a larger object undergoing an event in the real world cannot be the subject of the affectedness predication. Thus, the clause 'he cut off the leg of goat' (ex. 5a) cannot be followed by an affectedness predication with 'leg' as the subject (ex. 5b), but it may be followed by an affectedness predication with 'goat' as the subject, viz. 'the goat is cut' (ex. 5c).

Inherently transitive verbs that do not imply affectedness cannot occur in affectedness predications. These include the verbs of perception (see, hear, smell), cognitive verbs (know, think, forget), and even physical-contact verbs that do not inherently affect the form of the object (beat, touch). The affectedness predication is not stative, as stativity is a separate function coded by the construction *m* V1-V1.

Implications: The existence of the affectedness function in Mina correlates with the absence of the passive function in the language. The causal interpretation of this correlation may be that the feature [affectedness], in addition to its function with intransitive verbs, subsumes the prototypical semantic characteristics of the subjects of passive clauses in languages that have passive constructions. Mina has separate formal means to topicalize arguments.

Examples:

(1) *yəm mə shìbìt-ì nə làkwàt zá*
water REL disappear-AFF PREP pond EE
'the water has disappeared in the pond' (EE 'end of event')

(2) ***mə*** *rèb-**ì*** *kà*
REL bend-AFF CONC
'he/it is bent' (CONC 'speaker's concern)

(3a) *mə ɮím ɮím zá cìkíd* ***mə*** ***ndəv-yì*** *zá*
REL listen listen COMP sesame REL fall-STAT EE
'The one who was good at listening said, "A sesame seed fell down."'

(3b) *sə* ***m*** *yár-á-**y*** *nə zá*
1SG REL wander-GO-AFF ? EE
'I have come back (without having succeeded)' (in hunting, for example)

(4) kədəm *mə kàp-í zà*
calabash REL break AFF
'the calabash broke'

(5a) *à pəŋ ngàz tə nkwà*
3SG cut leg GEN goat
'he cut off the leg of goat'.

(5b) **ngàz tə nkù* ***m*** ***pəŋ-ì*** *zà/kà*
leg GEN goat REL cut-AFF EE/CONC
for 'the leg of the goat is cut' or any other meaning

(5c) *nkù* ***m*** ***pəŋ-ì*** *kà*
goat REL cut-AFF CONC
'the goat has been quartered'

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