

Genericity in Hungarian

0. Genericity in *ReALIS*. We claim that Hungarian data confirm Vogel and McGillion's (2002:163, 164) approach to the *nature of genericity*, according to which there is not any kind of "generic operator" in languages of the world and hence genericity is not an issue of semantics: "That a sentence may be understood as compatible with some concept that it does not express is not an issue of semantics, but of background conceptual structures or pragmatics. Proclivity to associate certain syntactic forms with certain types of genericity is a reinterpretation of distinctions that exists elsewhere in an exercise of synonymy avoidance." We also claim that in a new formal system of discourse semantics, called *ReALIS*, it is possible to compositionally derive the almost coinciding (generic/habitual) meanings belonging to different syntactic encodings, due to the peculiar method of unifying referents in the "proto-DRSs" (Kamp *et al.* 2004) retrieved by words of the sentences in question and specifying the logical connectives among these proto-DRSs.

1. Hungarian generic sentences. All the Hungarian sentences in (1-7) below mean practically the same: 'Czech men drink beer.' This fact is in total harmony with what Vogel and McGillion (2002:163, 164) write about generics cross-linguistically: "We observe the overwhelming cross-linguistic lack of encoding of cues which could be understood as a signal of a particular semantic content. We note the ready compatibility of a range of syntactic forms with each of a range of conceptual distinctions one might make about generics". "...there is a profound lack of syntactic cues to indicate when a sentence is to be interpreted as a generic or what sort of generic is intended. The paucity of syntactic encoding is cross-linguistic." "That a sentence may be understood as compatible with some concept that it does not express is not an issue of semantics, but of background conceptual structures or pragmatics. Proclivity to associate certain syntactic forms with certain types of genericity is a reinterpretation of distinctions that exists elsewhere in an exercise of synonymy avoidance."

(1) EXPLICIT CONDITIONAL SENTENCE:

Ha valaki (igazi) cseh férfi, akkor sört iszik.
 if someone (real) Czech man then beer-acc drink
 [e (r is a Czech man)] $\Rightarrow_{(\forall)}$
 ([t is a relevant point of time] \Rightarrow_{γ} [r is drinking beer at t]))

(2) UNIVERSAL TOPIC:

Minden (igazi) cseh férfi sört iszik.
 [r is a Czech man] $\Rightarrow_{(\forall)}$
 ([t is a relevant point of time] \Rightarrow_{γ} [r is drinking beer at t]))

(3) SUBORDINATION:

Aki (igazi) cseh férfi, (az) sört iszik.
 who (real) Czech man (that) beer-acc drink
 [r is a person] \Rightarrow_{γ} ([r is a Czech man] \Rightarrow_{γ} ([t is a relevant point of time] \Rightarrow_{γ} [r is drinking beer at t])))

(4) BARE TOPIC:

?(Igazi) Cseh férfi sört iszik! (v.ö. Magyar ember bort!)
 (real) Czech man beer-acc drink (Hungarian man wine-acc)
 [r is a Czech man] \Rightarrow_{γ} ([t is a relevant point of time] \Rightarrow_{γ} [r is drinking beer at t]))

(5) PLURAL TOPIC:

A cseh férfiak sört isznak.
 the Czech man-pl beer-acc drink-3pl
 first step: [r' \in group C] \Rightarrow_{\forall} [r' is a Czech man], [r'' is a Czech man] \Rightarrow_{\forall} [r'' \in C]
 second step: [r \in group C] \Rightarrow_{γ} ([t is a relevant point of time] \Rightarrow_{γ} [r is drinking beer at t]))

(6) INDEFINITE SINGULAR TOPIC:

Egy (igazi) cseh férfi sört iszik.
 a (real) Czech man beer-acc drink
 [e is a relevant situation] \Rightarrow_{γ} ([e (r is a Czech man at t)] \Rightarrow_{\exists} [r is drinking beer at t])

(7) DEFINITE PLURAL TOPIC:

Az (igazi) cseh férfi sört iszik.
 the (real) Czech man beer-acc drink
 [e is a relevant situation] \Rightarrow_{γ} ([e (r is the unique Czech man at t)] \Rightarrow_{\forall} [r is drinking beer at t])



(8) SPECIFIC CONTENT ('The Czech man is drinking beer.')

(Ott ül egy cseh férfi, egy holland nő és egy angol fiú.) *A cseh férfi söröt iszik.*
(there sit a Czech man, a Dutch woman and an English boy) the Czech man beer-acc drink
[(r is the unique Czech man at t) and (r is identical to an old referent r*)] \Rightarrow_{\forall}
[r is drinking beer at t where t is identical to the speech time τ]

Reduced version of the formula: [r* (a certain person) is drinking beer at τ (the speech time)]

3. **ReALIS**, *REciprocal And Lifelong Interpretation System*, is a new "post-Montagovian" (Dowty *et al.* 1981, Kamp *et al.* 2004) theory concerning the formal interpretation of sentences constituting coherent discourses (Asher and Lascarides 2003), with a *lifelong* model of lexical, interpersonal and cultural/encyclopedic knowledge of interpreters in its center including their *reciprocal* knowledge on each other. The decisive theoretical feature of ReALIS lies in a peculiar reconciliation of three objectives which are all worth accomplishing in formal semantics but could not be reconciled so far.

The first aim concerns the exact formal basis itself, which is often mentioned as Montague's Thesis (Partee 1996): human languages can be described as interpreted *formal* systems. The second aim concerns *compositionality*, which can be defined as the property that the meaning of a whole is a function of the meaning of its parts, practically postulating the existence of a homomorphism from syntax to semantics, i.e. a rule-to-rule correspondence between the two sides of grammar.

In Montague's interpretation systems a traditional logical representation played the role of an intermediate level between the syntactic representation and the world model, but Montague argued that this intermediate level of representation can, and should, be eliminated. The post-Montagovian history of formal semantics (Kamp *et al.* 2004, Asher and Lascarides 2003), however, seems to have proven the opposite, some principle of "discourse representationalism": "some level of [intermediate] representation is indispensable in modeling the interpretation of natural language" (Dekker 2000).

The Thesis of ReALIS is that the two fundamental Montagovian objectives *can* be reconciled with the principle of "discourse representationalism" – by embedding discourse representations in the world model, getting rid of an intermediate level of representation in this way while preserving its content and relevant structural characteristics. This idea can be carried out in the larger-scale framework of embedding discourse representations in the world model *not directly* but as parts of the representations of interpreters' minds, i.e. that of their (permanently changing) information states.

4. "Underspecified" formulae belonging to generic sentences in ReALIS. We thus claim that ReALIS makes it possible to compositionally derive the almost coinciding (generic/habitual) meanings belonging to the sentences in (1-7) above. Furthermore, the specific reading in (8) can be derived from the generic formula in (7) by anchoring referents r and t to referents fixed earlier; these anchorings are preferred due to some "Maximize Discourse Coherence" principle applied in discourse theories (Asher and Lascarides 2005: 22). Generic formulae thus can be regarded as DRS-like *representations* that are (partially) *underspecified*: certain referents could not be anchored to earlier ones and certain logical connectives among the DRS pieces could not be specified. As consisting of practically the same proto-DRS pieces, these underspecified formulae (in spite of their differences) will result in specified formulae carrying almost coinciding meanings after some pragmatic process of specification.

There is no space in this abstract to elucidate all details of the (simplified) formulae in (1-8) below. We highlight two factors here. The DRS pieces contain *eventuality* (e) and *temporal* (t, τ) referents in addition to referents belonging to people and objects, which can each undergo quantification (typically providing formulae of similar content). As for quantification, several sentences provide no explicit logical connectives but only *underspecified* ones, marked by symbol ' \Rightarrow_{γ} ' above, which can be specified later (e.g. \Rightarrow_{\forall} ('always'), \Rightarrow_{\exists} ('once')) due to pragmatic factors.

Asher, Nicholas – Alex Lascarides 2003: *Logics of Conversation*, Cambridge Univ. Press.

Dekker, Paul 2000: Coreference and Representationalism, in K. von Heusinger – U. Egli eds.: *Reference and Anaphoric Relations*, Kluwer, Dordrecht.

Dowty, David R. – Robert E. Wall – Stanley Peters 1981: *Introduction to Montague Semantics*, D. Reidel Publishing Company, Dordrecht.

Kamp, Hans – Josef van Genabith – Uwe Reyle 2004: Discourse Representation Theory, ms. to appear in *Handbook of Philosophical Logic*, source: <http://www.ims.uni-stuttgart.de/~hans>.

Partee, Barbara H. 1996: The Development of Formal Semantics in Linguistic Theory, in Lappin, Shalom ed.: *The Handbook of Contemporary Semantic Theory*, Oxford: Blackwell, 11–38.

Vogel, Carl – Michelle McGillion 2002: Genericity is Conceptual, not Semantic, in G. Alberti – K. Balogh – P. Dekker eds.: *Proc's of the Seventh Symp. on Logic and Language*, U. Pécs, 163–172.