

Mapping Case and Agency: A Lattice-Based Approach

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The typological literature has demonstrated that parameters such as agency and affectedness influence the realization of case-marking; yet, explicitly connecting individual parameters with the semantics of case-marking patterns has largely proven elusive. Here a feature-based representation of agency properties is proposed, loosely based on Dowty (1991), but reformulated in terms of privative opposition and hierarchically organized via a lattice. This approach generates a structure which can account for individual case systems as well as deliver predictions about typological generalizations. As such, this system complements the work on the semantic maps of case markers, while building upon insights accrued from work in formal and lexical semantics. For instance, one of the aims of this lattice structure is to illuminate the correspondence between the multi-functionality of a given case marker with the semantic similarity among its multiple functions.

I assume a set of event-based properties entailed by the verb referring to modes of participation in events: *instigation*, *motion*, *sentience*, *volition*, corresponding to the active ingredients of agency, and degrees of *persistence*, corresponding to affectedness. *Persistence* is a two-tiered notion, for something can persist existentially, its essence remains the same throughout the event, or it can persist qualitatively, it persists in all its particulars. Either of these can obtain at the beginning and/or the end of the event, in terms of features: *existential persistence (beginning)*, *existential persistence (end)*, *qualitative persistence (beginning)*, and *qualitative persistence (end)*. Establishing agency properties in this manner leads to two diametrically opposed classes in privative opposition: one a maximal agent possessing all the properties and the other not entailing any. Ordering these properties and their combinations by inclusion (modulo impossibilities, e.g., *volition* must co-occur with *sentience*) yields a partial order, which can be structured as a lattice. This lattice structure provides a space upon which argument structures can be mapped.

The agency features above are responsible for argument realization, i.e., which arguments are selected as subject, object, etc. Inasmuch as governed cases make reference to argument structure properties, a case-marker can be represented as ranging over one or more (connected) node(s) in the lattice. Once a region is established for the core use of a case-marker, it is then incumbent on the semantic features of that region to explain the more peripheral uses of that case. For example, that the dative, which prototypically marks the recipient, often marks experiencers can be grounded in the fact that both functions map to the same node (they are qualitatively affected and +*sentience*, but -*volition*). Similarly, the association of the instrumental case with the comitative function is expected in that the region of the instrumental (+*total persistence*, +*motion*) differs from that of the comitative by one feature (+*sentience*). This structure makes the further prediction that grammaticalization should only proceed through connected nodes.

While this framework is related to the account of case in Jakobson (1984), it is not limited to one language-particular case system, rather it shares with semantic maps that the general space of the structure corresponds to the typological space, of which any given language-particular system is one particular subspace. In sum, a comparison between the inductive method of semantic maps and the deductive method put forth here promises to be instructive concerning how the findings of formal and lexical semantics may contribute to the work on semantic maps and vice versa.

References

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