

Habitual Generics

Bibhuti Bhusan Mahapatra
Collège Boréal, Toronto

Habitual generic sentences are understood as generalizations over ‘stages’ or ‘objects’, cf. Carlson (1977: 170-171). Alternatively, they are also understood as generalisations over episodic events, cf. (Krifka, Pelletier et al. 1995: 16-17).

However, the present paper, by using the data from Marathi and Oḍia, addresses the nature of some ‘habitual generic’ sentences which do not neatly comply with above analyses:

(1) ma:sa: pa:ny-a:t as-t-o (Marathi)

fish water-in cop-impf agr

‘The fish is found in water.’ / ‘The fish is available in water.’

(2) ma:cha pa:ṇi-re tha: -ø - e (Oḍia)

fish water-loc cop-impf-agr

‘The fish is found in water. / ‘The fish is available in water.’

Marathi and Oḍia, which have multi-copula systems, select their habitual generic copulas in (1)-(2) to suggest that the sentences have habitual generic interpretations. However, (1)-(2) do not have their stage-level or episodic counterparts; so the stage-level copulas are inconsistent with them, as shown in (3)-(4) below:

(3) ?*ma:sa: pa:ny-a:t a:h-e (Marathi)

fish water-in cop.pres-agr

‘The fish is in water.’

(4) ?*ma:cha pa:ṇi-re ach -ø - i (Oḍia)

fish water-loc cop-pres-agr

‘The fish is in water.’

Thus, (1)-(2) cannot be taken as generalisations over ‘stages’ or episodic events. Alternatively, one can assume that the predicates of (1)-(2) are primarily ‘object-level’, ‘lexical-stative’; and their habitual generic readings are built as a generalization over their object-level ‘lexical-stative’ reading. The predicates which primarily have object-level ‘lexical-stative’ reading in Oḍia take the *aṭ* copula. However, these predicates do not select the *aṭ* copula:

(5) *ma:cha pa:ṇi-re aṭ-e/ø (Oḍia)

fish water-loc cop-pres-agr

‘The fish is in water.’

So, the habitual generic reading of (1)-(2) is not built on their ‘object-level’, lexical-stative reading.

Lewis (1975) uses adverbs as quantifiers, which quantify over events. The adverbs function as generic operators and mark the sense of ‘habitual generics’. However, one cannot apply Lewis style generalisation over event to capture the habitual generic sense of (1)-(2).

In fact, the present paper proposes that the habitual generic reading of (1)-(2) involves generalisation over the speaker’s observations. The proposal, in a simple way, can explain why the generalisation marked by specific copula choice in Marathi and Oḍia in (1)-(2) is expressed by an observation verb, such as *find* in English.

Reference

- Carlson, G. N. (1977). Reference to kinds in English. Doctoral dissertation, University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Reproduced by Indiana University Linguistics Club, March 1978.
- Krifka, M., Pelletier, F.J. et al. 1995. 'Genericity: an Introduction. In *The Generic Book* (eds.) Carlson G. N. and Pelletier, F. J. University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London.
- Lewis, D. (1975). 'Adverbs of Quantification', in *Formal Semantics in Natural Language*, ed. E. L. Keenan, Cambridge University Press.