German psych adjectives

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Abstract

Psychological predicates have been an important topic in linguistic research for the last decades. Due to their exceptional structural properties, they are a challenge for grammatical theory. The central argument – the experiencer – shows variation with respect to its syntactic function within and across languages. This observation is followed by the major question of argument linking with psychological predicates (Pesetsky 1987, 1999; Belletti/Rizzi 1988; Grimshaw 1990).

Although psych-adjectives seem just as semantically coherent as the corresponding class of verbs (i.e. their reference to emotional states), they are not part of the main discussion about the grounding structure of psychological predicates in general. Exceptions are Bennis (2000, 2004) and Landau (1999, 2006), who focus on structural properties of different adjective classes, and Bouillon (1996), Goy (2000) and Jackendoff (2007), who analyze the lexical-semantic base of emotional adjectives in French, Italian and English. Rákosi (2006) and Kim (2008) interesting insights for Hungarian and Korean dative psych adjectives. For German psych-adjectives, we find a short syntactic discussion in Gallmann (1992).

In this paper, we will see that German psychological adjectives exhibit the same structural characteristics as psychological verbs. The syntactic function of the experiencer argument they take is not predictable at first, as (1) and (2) illustrate.

(1) Der Vater$_{EXP}$ ist dem Lehrer$_{STIM}$ böse/abgeneigt/zugetan.
      the father.NOM is the teacher.DAT angry
      'The father is angry with the teacher.'

(2) Der Vater$_{STIM}$ ist dem Lehrer$_{EXP}$ wichtig/bekannt/unheimlich.
      the teacher.NOM is the father.DAT important/known/scary
      'The father is important/known/scary to the teacher.'

Hence, one main focus of the paper is to identify the semanto-syntactic properties of subject- and object experiencer adjectives. On the basis of German language examples and semantic tests, it can be shown that there are different semantic features grounding these argument realizations. If the experiencer is realized as an object, the assignment of an emotional or mental state is accompanied by an evaluation process inside the experiencer. Furthermore, since object experiencer constructions unlike subject experiencers are similar to the uses of dativus iudicantis (3) and evaluative adjectives (4) in many points, there is additional evidence for a different underlying semantic concept.

(3) Der Vater ist dem Lehrer zu blöd.
      the father.NOM is the teacher.DAT too stupid.
      'The father too stupid for the teacher.'

(4) Es ist blöd das zu tun.
      it is stupid that to do
      'It is stupid to do that.'

The paper makes a novel contribution to the well-established psych-discussion and constitutes a fundament for further typological and experimental research, in particular as related to adjectives as a psych predicate subclass.

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