

Abstract

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Subordinate clauses as manner adverbials? – Composing hypothetical comparison clauses in German

The semantics of adverbials relating to the lower verbal domain is mostly tackled from the perspective of non-sentential modifiers, such as adverbs or prepositional phrases. However, (fully or partly) articulated subordinate clauses may also contribute, for instance, a manner modification. This talk will be concerned with the compositional semantics of one particularly intriguing example, namely, hypothetical comparison clauses (= HCCs) in German such as *Ben fährt Rad, {wie wenn er betrunken wäre / als wenn er betrunken wäre / als ob er betrunken wäre / als wäre er betrunken}* ('Ben is cycling as if he were drunk'). I will defend the following hypotheses: (i) HCCs license an equivalence relation between the given explicit matrix information and entities provided by hypothetical scenarios. (ii) The equivalence relation may have ontologically distinct relata: it relates either manners or participants of hypothetical events and the given matrix event (= V-HCCs), or, hypothetical topic situations and the matrix situation against which the given matrix clause as a whole is evaluated (= S-HCCs). The proposed semantic distinction is attributed to a structural and, thus, compositional contrast: V-HCCs adjoin the verbal head of the matrix clause while S-HCCs are CP-adjuncts. (iii) The mediating equivalence relation roots in *wie* and *als*; however, while HCCs with *wie* allow a regular compositional interpretation in terms of by and large ordinary free relative clauses, *als* involves idiosyncratic semantic (and syntactic) properties.