

A contrastive analysis of nominal predication: German vs. Russian

This paper proposes a contrastive analysis of predicate alternation, as in German (1a/b) and in Russian (2a/b), at the syntax/semantics interface.

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| (1) a. Udo war Diplomat.
Udo was diplomat. | b. Udo war ein Diplomat.
Udo was a diplomat. | <German> |
| (2) a. Udo byl diplomatom.
Udo was diplomat.INS | b. Udo byl diplomat.
Udo was diplomat.NOM | <Russian> |

Following Krifka (1995) I assume that nouns in general and head nouns of predicate NPs denote kinds. The form and the denotation of the predicate NP depends on its role in predication. I distinguish between two types of predication: complete predication that concerns the whole individual, and partial predication that concerns some aspect of it. Indefinite predicate NPs in German (1b) and NPs in Nominative in Russian (2b) are involved in complete predication. Bare NPs in German (1a) and NPs in the Instrumental case in Russian (2a) are involved in partial predication. Partial predication is syntactically and semantically mediated in a small clause complement of the copula. The subject of the small clause denotes a set of social aspects of the individual bound by the matrix subject. However, Russian and German differ with respect to the domain of specification of the social aspect. While in German the subject of partial predication is a well-established, stereotypical, social aspect, such as profession, nationality etc.; in Russian any aspect of the individual relevant in a specific discourse situation can serve as a subject in the small clause: it need not be stereotypical or well-established. The correlation between well-establishedness or stereotypicality and a more simple form of the NP, namely the articleless bare NP in German (1a), can be explained by the pragmatic principle that Levinson (2000: 32) summarizes as “what is simply described is stereotypically exemplified”.