

THE NATURE OF A PREDICATE: THE CASE OF DEPICTIVES*

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1. Introduction

Depictive predicates are adjuncts with specific event-related properties. An analysis that derives these properties in the most comprehensive way is still a matter of debate. In this paper, we propose a structural account of depictive predicates and claim that their interpretations are grounded in syntax. This account is part of our general theory of predicates, which characterizes the functional head of the predicate phrase as a particular type of discourse element. We show that this head is central to an analysis of depictive constructions as well as to other predication domains, allowing for a unified account of secondary predicate types. Our analysis thus further advances the understanding of the nature of predicate constructions in general.

1.1 Depictive event-related properties

We address here two fundamental properties of depictive constructions. First, they exhibit event simultaneity; that is, the depictive predicate must be true of its host at the same time as the main event is true (see Halliday 1967, Rapoport 1991, Geuder 2000, Irimia 2012, Motut 2014, Irimia and Rapoport 2018). This is illustrated by (1), from Keshet (2010).

(1) Jones cut the bread *hot*, #but it was cold at the time.

We see in (1) that the depictive predicate *hot* must be true of its host, *the bread*, at the time of the main verbal event, the cutting of that bread.

A second property is the depictive predicate's (henceforth: DPred) restriction to stage-level predicates or to a stage-level interpretation (Rapoport 1993, Winkler 1997, Simpson 2005, a.o.), as illustrated in (2), from Rapoport (1993).

(2) a. We sold the cow *sick*/**stupid*.
b. Ayala read the book *used*/**interesting*.

The contrasts in (2) show that stage-level predicates such as *sick* and *used* can be DPreds. Individual-level predicates like *stupid* and *interesting*, on the other hand, cannot.

These two event-related properties are derived from the structural analysis of the depictive predicate that we propose here, which itself is part of our analysis of predicates in general. The structure of this paper is as follows: In section 2, we present our discourse-related account of syntactic predicates. In section 3, we introduce the specific proposal for

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depictive predicates. Then in section 4, we demonstrate how our implementation based on discourse linking extends to stative predicates and stative constructions. We discuss how our analysis relates to several arguments for and against a functional predicate head in Section 5 and conclude in Section 6.

2. On predicates and stage heads

In order to present our analysis of depictives, we first introduce a theory of non-verbal predicates in general. We begin with the assumption that a predicate is necessarily true of a time and place. Whereas verbal predicates can be true of a time and place by virtue of their own properties in combination with little ν (and other functional projections), the construction of non-verbal predicates, we argue, requires a particular discourse-related functional head. This head is what we term a STAGE, or σ , as described in (3).¹

(3) STAGE (σ): A discourse element with time and place coordinates.

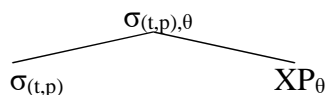
Such stages characterize all non-verbal predicates.² A second property that characterizes all predicates is their thematic ability to take an external argument.³ Thus, a predicate assigns a θ -role to its host.

We therefore propose the definition of a syntactic predicate in (4).

(4) Syntactic predicate = a θ -assigning phrase merged with a stage σ , true of a time/place
= σP

The structure of a (non-verbal) syntactic predicate that we propose is as in (5).

(5) Syntactic Predicate = σ Phrase



As shown, the σP predicate includes time and place coordinates in addition to the theta-role assigned by the XP (AP, PP, NP) lexical predicate. Since σ 's time and place coordinates must be valued, the interpretation of a σP predicate necessarily results in that

¹ The σ we propose is not the same as the conceptual situation σ that corresponds to the linguistic situation s in Copley & Harley (2015). It does, however, bear some resemblance to the situation pro (s) found in, for example, Percus (2000) and Keshet (2010). However, the syntactic and discourse element σ differs from the semantic situation pro. Since DPred σ is valued by discourse Anchor σ , there is only one possible specification for time/place in a depictive clause. Also, verb phrases do not need to merge with σ to form a predicate. σ is also not identical to Dikken's (2006) linkers or relators.

² This statement is (thus) also true of primary (non-verbal) predicates, although these are not our focus here.

³ We can adopt Williams (1980, 1987) in assuming that the ability of a phrasal projection XP to take an external argument derives from the property of its X head.

predicate being true of a time/place.⁴ We see thus that predicates are relevant to the semantic, syntactic, and information structure components. We turn next to an examination of one discourse relation involved in secondary predicate constructions.

2.1 Valuing the stage head in depictive constructions

The time/place coordinates of σ must be valued in order for the σ P to be completely interpreted. The principal mode of valuing σ is via identification by the highest σ stage, the element of the high discourse layer that provides the spatio-temporal parameters of the clause. We term this upper head ANCHOR σ (our structural implementation of Erteschik-Shir's 1997 Stage Topic). Anchor σ generally values lower σ with the time/place specification of the clause, the here-and-now of the discourse.

The Anchor σ of a clause is one of the set of permanently-available topics (in the sense of Erteschik-Shir 1997, 2007; equivalent to Bianchi's 2003 *Logophoric Centre*), the others being the discourse elements Speaker and Addressee. Anchor σ as a discourse head is structurally located at the upper left periphery, as shown in (6), together with Speaker and Addressee. (This follows along the lines of Speas and Tenny's 2003 *Speech Act* layer, Sigurðsson 2012's *speech event*, Giorgi 2010 *Speaker Projection*, or Wiltschko's 2014 *Anchoring Projection*.)

(6) Anchor σ : [Anchor $\sigma_{[t,p]}$ [CP...]]

Adapting the references above, we assume that all sentences contain Anchor σ .⁵ We follow Erteschik-Shir in that Anchor σ 's values can be updated by a restricted set of elements, including Tense and adverbials. In addition, under our analysis, Anchor σ values v (and via v also V)—if these elements are present in the clause. This linking results in the interpretation that the event time of the verb is identical to the (updated) discourse time.

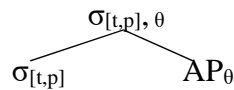
We turn now to our central focus: the manner in which Anchor σ values DPred σ .

3. Depictive predicates

Given the structure in (5) for syntactic predicates in general, (7) is our analysis of the adjectival depictive predicate (DPred): the DPred is a σ P, consisting of a lexical AP merged with σ .

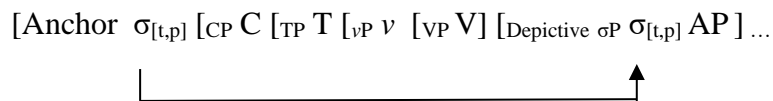
⁴ For present purposes, we will not be representing time and place specifications separately.

⁵ Anchor σ is also the pivot for truth-value assessment when it is the main topic of the sentence, according to Erteschik-Shir (1997).

(7) Depictive predicate = σ Phrase

The depictive predicate's σ head is unvalued at merge: its time and place coordinates must be specified in order for the depictive σ Phrase to be interpreted. This valuing is accomplished by linking the DPred σ P to the clause's discourse time/place specification, Anchor σ .⁶ The identification of the DPred stage by the Anchor stage is sketched in (8).⁷

(8) Depictive stage identification



This identification, namely the specification of depictive σ by Anchor σ , directly yields the event-properties of (1) and (2) above, in the following way.

Because the time/place of DPred σ is valued by Anchor σ (the discourse time/place), the time/place of DPred is identical to the discourse time/place. Anchor σ also values v and V and thus the verbal predicate time is also identical to Anchor σ . Given these two valuing by Anchor σ , the time/place of the depictive predicate is identical to the time/place of the verbal event. The result is the temporal simultaneity noted above.

The stage-level restriction also results from the valuing of the time/place of DPred σ by Anchor σ . Since Anchor σ specifies a particular time and place of discourse, the DPred does as well. Thus the DPred will necessarily be stage-level.⁸ In this way, our analysis derives the two basic event-related properties of depictives: event-simultaneity and the stage-level restriction.

The event-related predicative use of the AP is distinct from the attributive AP found DP-internally, although the lexical AP is identical (at least, in many languages).⁹ Our claim is that it is precisely the composition with σ (and the requisite valuing of σ) that distinguishes the predicative use from the attributive use of an AP.

The two uses of AP are found in different contexts. This distinction is illustrated by the following (as noted in Rapoport 1999):

⁶ The low σ cannot link to discourse independently, but must be valued within its own clause.

⁷ One potential issue, brought to our attention by Martina Wiltschko, is the low position of this head, given the wide-spread assumption that discourse-related functional projections are normally found very high in the left periphery. However, recent work has demonstrated that discourse-linking categories are found in lower positions too. See, for example, Irimia (2021) for evidence from an independent phenomenon, namely differential object marking.

⁸ See Section 4 for discussion of stative sentences.

⁹ See Truswell (2006, e.g.) for a discussion of the semantic properties and syntactic characterization of predicate adjectives and attributive adjectives.

- (9) What did you do with the sick cow?
- a. #I bought the cow sick, but first I made sure it was well.
 - b. I bought the sick cow, but first I made sure it was well.

(9)a shows that when the AP *sick* is a DPred, a contradiction ensues with the addition of the description that the cow is well before/while being bought. On the other hand, when the AP is used attributively, as in (9)b, there is no contradiction between the referential use of the entire DP *the sick cow* and the claim that the cow had been made well before being bought. This distinction is due, as we claim, to the merging of the AP in its predicate use with the discourse-related σ head.

4. Stative predicates and stative constructions

We have claimed that a syntactic predicate is characterized by a stage head, an element with a time/place specification. This immediately raises the question: how does this view account for individual-level predicates, which are not true of a particular time/place? In this section, we show how our account extends to individual-level predicates as well, arguing that they, too, are merged with σ . We focus here on two constructions: small clauses and stative depictives.

4.1 Small clauses

Typically, small clauses contain individual-level predicates. Consider the following:

- (10) Jane considers [_{SC} Mary wise].

The verb *consider* is an intensional predicate, which generally takes individual-level configurations, including small clauses, as complements. In the small clause complement in (10), the adjectival predicate *wise* is indeed individual-level. In order to show our analysis of this type of construction, we first briefly examine its main predication parallel, as exemplified in (11).

- (11) Mary is wise.

Our σ -based approach derives the individual-level interpretation of (11) as follows. Adopting the analysis of Erteschik-Shir and Rapoport (2011), we assume that it is the subject of an individual-level predicate that defines the spatio-temporal parameters of the stage. In the case of (11), to be precise, all times/places are specified by the subject *Mary*: While *Mary* exists, she is wise. We have represented this valuing as in (12).

(12) Anchor σ [Mary is [σ wise ...]]



The interpretation resulting from this specification of Anchor σ is that the predicate *wise* is true of all times/places that are Mary; that is, the predicate is true of Mary at all times and places at which she exists. In this way, we derive the individual-level interpretation: It is true of Mary, at all times and places, that she is wise.

This individual-level interpretation of (12) holds for small clauses too.¹⁰ We suggest that the verb *consider* selects a subject-predicate structure whose stage σ head is identified by the small clause subject, parallel to the identification by the subject in (12). The small clause predicate is thus true of all times and places in which its subject exists.

To illustrate: in a sentence like (10) σ -identification is as shown in (13).

(13) Small clause σ -identification: e.g. *Jane considers Mary wise*.

ANCHOR $\sigma_{[t,p]}$ [CP C [TP Jane [T [vP v [consider [σ_P Mary σ [wise]]]....



σ -identification, combined with θ -assignment, yields the relevant individual-level interpretation of *wise*: Jane considers Mary wise at all times/places at which Mary exists.

4.2 Stative depictives

We turn now to an examination of a different type of stative construction. Consider the example in (14).^{11,12}

(14) I hate Mary drunk.

¹⁰ This might beg the question as to how examples like (i), with stage-level predicates, might be analyzed:

(i) I consider Mary too drunk to drive (right now).

Too drunk to drive is not individual-level. In fact, a more accurate analysis of *consider* is that, as an intensional predicate, it selects a referentially-stable situation, of which an individual-level predicate is the main subtype. Thus, when the lower predicate's σ is valued by an individual such as *Mary*, this yields referential stability (as long as Mary is alive). The lower predicate of (i) *too drunk to drive* is a high degree, which creates in this case a referentially-stable situation: The level of drunkenness is not going to change at this time. It is not surprising, then, to see that this predicate is well-formed in a small clause selected by *consider*. This does not conflict with the fact that *consider* does not, in general, select stage-level predications.

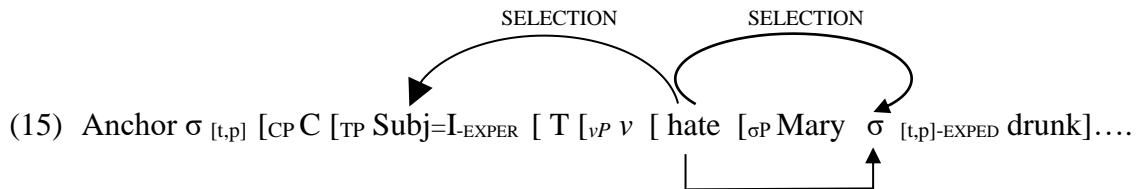
¹¹ We consider sentences of the type in (14) to be stative depictives, contrary to Winkler (1997) and Rapoport (1999), who claim that secondary predicates with stative verbs are not depictives. One of the reasons for their claim is the apparent complement status of the secondary predicate in the stative cases, as opposed to the adjunct status of most depictives. See the discussion in Simpson (2005), who notes that if the state denoted by the stative verb is stage-level, typical depictives are indeed possible.

¹² We thank Dennis Storoshenko for bringing to our attention that there is a range in judgments with respect to sentences like (14): from speakers who do not accept them to those who, like our consultants, find not only one, but two possible readings. We have no account for this discrepancy at this point.

At first glance, (14) seems identical to (10), a ‘consider’ type of small clause. In fact, under our analysis, both verb types select σ -headed small clause complements. However, as we now demonstrate, the *hate* construction is distinct, both in its selectional properties and in the manner in which the small clause σ is valued.

We base our analysis of the psych verb *hate* on the understanding that hating something is based on previous relevant experiences by the hater. In a sentence such as (14), the verb *hate* must quantify over a set of previous relevant occurrences in the experiencer's experience in order for the statement to be true.

The verb *hate*, thus, selects two arguments, as shown in (15): an experiencer (EXPER) and the set of previous experiences (=t/p, EXPED) of that experiencer. Here, the experiencer argument is realized by the higher subject, *I*, whereas the time/place specification of the second argument is realized by the σ head of the small clause. Thus, via thematic selection, these two elements are related in a hate relation, as shown in (15).¹³



The lower, complement σ is valued via selection by the verb *hate*. These experienced times/places are in turn restricted by the elements of the selected small clause: in the example here, σ 's specifier and complement *Mary drunk*. In this way, the times/places of the previous hate experiences are restricted to those in which Mary is drunk. We thus derive the correct set of ‘relevant’ experiences, i.e. relevant to the context of the particular clause.¹⁴ (Anchor $\sigma_{[t,p]}$ is valued, as with all individual-level predicates, by the subject, the higher subject experiencer *I*: it is true of me, at all t/p I exist, that I hate Mary drunk.)

The interpretation of the entire structure is therefore:

- (15') I hate all those times/places in my experience at which Mary is drunk.
= I hate when Mary is drunk.

The different valuing of σ thus distinguishes *hate*'s complement from that of *consider*: Whereas *consider*'s σ complement is valued by an individual (the small clause subject), *hate*'s σ is valued via selection by the verb as a set of times/places. In a nutshell, *consider* relates two subjects and *hate* relates a subject and its experiences.

Our analysis thus rules out sentences such as the following:

¹³ We are not claiming that *hate* takes only the small clause complement represented here. *Hate* may also take a DP complement, in which case the previous experiences are restricted by the content of the nominal.


¹⁴ We do not derive the undesirable generic valuing of σ as ‘all previous times and places of hating by me’. We thank Egor Tsedryk for pointing out the problem with a generic component.

(16) *I hate Mary wise.

Individual-level secondary predicates, such as *wise*, cannot be true of episodic, experienced times/places. This is as opposed to ‘consider’ predicates, in which times and places can be defined by the individual. As a result, the only possible interpretation for (16) would be the (usually) impossible: ‘I hate when Mary is wise’.¹⁵

Consider another reading of (14), as noted by our consultants. Imagine a scenario in which we are at a bar and Mary is also there, obviously inebriated and misbehaving. I turn to you and say, *I hate Mary drunk*. In such a case, it is Mary’s drunkenness in the here-and-now that is relevant.

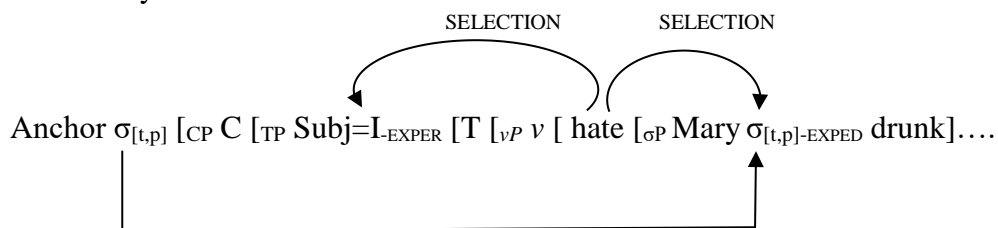
As above, our explanation begins by comparing this case with its main-predication parallel. Consider the main predication of (17)a, with a stage-level predicate, and the specification of the predicate σ head as shown in (17)b.

- (17) a. Mary is drunk.
 b. Anchor σ [Mary is [σ drunk ...]]
- 

In (17), the σ merged with the AP *drunk* is valued by the time/place of the current discourse as specified by Anchor σ . As a result, the interpretation is stage-level: In the here-and-now, Mary is drunk.

In the case of the stage-level reading of (14), the lower σ , while selected by *hate*, is additionally restricted by the time/place of Anchor σ , as illustrated in (18).

(18) I hate Mary drunk.



The interpretation of (18) is derived as follows: We have claimed above that *hate* selects all the hater's relevant experienced times/places and that these are restricted to those of Mary's drunkenness. What happens in this particular case is that the relevant times/places have been reduced by linking to Anchor σ to one particular here-and-now instance of drunkenness of Mary. The interpretation is thus: ‘Right now, I am hating Mary being drunk.’

In summary, *consider* is an intensional predicate; one, we have claimed, that selects a referentially-stable situation. Individual-level predicates do describe such a situation.

¹⁵ Sentences like *Jones prefers her coffee black* (Rapoport 1999: 654) and *She likes her men intelligent*, which involve apparently generic noun phrases, demonstrate a prediction of our analysis: individual-level predicates under psych verbs are fine, as long as σ ranges over instances.

Thus, *consider* normally selects for such predicates. *Hate*, on the other hand, selects for times/places in the hater's experience. This allows for a different range of predicate choice than is found with *consider*, as with the stage-level here-and-now reading just discussed. As we have seen, the two verbs *consider* and *hate* yield different complement types, due to the nature of the σ head that each selects and the mode of valuing of that σ .

The interpretation of the small clause predicate as individual-level or stage-level thus depends on the combination of the selectional properties of the main verb and the particular mode of σ valuation. The multiple possibilities of σ valuation allow for the flexibility of predicate interpretation without the need to postulate elements specific to one or the other structure or structure-specific mechanisms.

In the next section, we present further advantages of the σ head over other possible analyses of secondary predicate constructions.

5. Some observations about the functional predicate head

The postulation of a functional projection in secondary predicates raises various questions, especially for recent accounts, such as Matushansky (2019), which have tried to eliminate functional material from the syntax of secondary predicates. In this section we present a few of Matushansky's main objections to accounts such as Bowers (1993, 2001) and show how our analysis avoids them.

One observation Bowers (1993) makes is that in small clauses (and other embedded contexts, among which are secondary predicates), phrases of distinct lexical categories can be co-ordinated. For example, we see in (19) that an AP and a NP can be coordinated, as can an AP and a PP.

(19) Coordination of unlikes:

- a. I consider Fred crazy and a fool.
- b. I consider Mary both shrewd and in the know.

In order to derive coordination, which, under strict theories must involve categories of the same syntactic type, Bowers argues that it is the functional projection *Pred* which permits coordination. In a structure like [_{PredP} DP [_{Pred'} *Pred* XP]], the AP, NP, or PP that can realize the XP predicate phrase of the small clause are, in fact, all *PredPs*. Thus, under Bowers' view, it is not surprising that they can be coordinated.

However, as Matushansky (2019, p. 67-68) correctly points out, this argument for *Pred* is not necessary, since projections of different lexical heads may, in fact, be coordinated, irrespective of whether they are found in small clauses or in main clauses. A sentence like the one in (20) is illustrative:

(20) The surgeon operated quickly and with great care.

In (20), an adverb (phrase) is coordinated with a PP. Since the coordinated phrases are not *PredPs*, it must be the semantics of the coordinate constituents that restricts coordination, as Matushansky observes. As long as the coordinated constituents are of the

same semantic type, their union goes through. Our analysis in terms of σ does not violate this requirement and, in fact, takes further steps towards understanding the nature of the semantic principle underlying coordination.

Moving to a second set of arguments, Bowers is interested in examples involving movement. In GB, such cases were problematic, given the Small Clause analysis in (21), together with the assumption that the predicate, being a non-maximal projection, was not subject to movement. Bowers solved the problem with his analysis of Small Clauses as PredPs, as in (22), in which AP is complement to the Pred head.

(21) What does John consider [_{AP} Bill [_{A'} ~~what~~]] (Matushansky 2018, ex. 17)

(22) What does John consider [_{PREDP} Bill [_{PRED} [_{AP} ~~what~~]]] (Bowers 1993, 2001)

Since AP is a maximal projection, it is correctly predicted to be able to move.

However, as Matushansky observes, the ban on moving non-maximal projections is a GB theory-internal postulate, and, is, in fact, no longer generally assumed. Under our analysis this issue is irrelevant, since σ anyway merges with a maximal projection.

Another putatively problematic case is that of sentences like (23)a, which have been discussed in relation to the Pred head. Assuming again a SC structure as in (21), it is not clear how two elements that need to be merged in a similar specifier position would be generated. The only possible implementation is generating multiple specifiers, as in (23)b. Since these were not allowed in GB, Bowers claimed that PredP saved the derivation in an unstipulative way, as seen in (23)c.

(23) Multiple Specifiers (Matushansky 2019, p.70)

a. I consider Josiah **her father's** best friend. (ex. 20a)

b. I consider [_{AP} Josiah [_{AP} her father's [_{A'} best friend]]]

c. I consider [_{PREDP} Josiah [_{PRED} [_{AP} her father's [_{A'} best friend]]]]

However, the ban on multiple specifiers has been shown to be unmotivated. And as above, such configurations are not problematic for a σ analysis.

Matushansky also notes that Pred conflicts with the DP theory in a problematic manner. Under most accounts, NPs are seen as inherent $\langle e, t \rangle$ categories (Longobardi 2008, a.o.). The merge of the (definite) determiner triggers a shift from $\langle e, t \rangle$ to $\langle e \rangle$. Thus, Bowers' hypothesis that Pred is necessary to create $\langle e, t \rangle$ categories with NP predicates must be adjusted in a significant way, but it is not clear how, in order to maintain its main insight. Our analysis does not run into these problems. For us, the predicative semantics of the functional head is not an issue. We assume that NP/AP/PPs can be predicates semantically. The question we explore here is how such categories combine to form syntactic predicates.

Next, consider another counterargument to Pred, namely the one related to predicative case. In many languages (such as Russian, Finnish, Hungarian, etc.), adjective secondary predicates show not only case marking, but also alternations in case marking. It is not clear how these observations are to be unstipulatively derived under Bowers' analysis in which Pred assigns case. The only possibility is to assume that Pred can have more than

one instantiation, some of these being null in some languages. However, as Matushansky (2019, p.75) points out, ‘we do not expect a functional head to be vacuous at both interfaces’. Discourse-specified σ is obviously not vacuous. Although we do not discuss here alternations in secondary predicate case marking, our account in terms of σ can accommodate these facts.

Finally, we address the problem of expletives. Contrary to Bowers’ (1993, 2001) account expletives appear to be possible in small clauses. (See Svenonius 1996 for several other examples of this type). A relevant case is seen in (24).

(24) I want it cold (when I go skiing). (Matushansky 2019, ex. 21a)

For Bowers, Pred is a thematic element that theta-marks the external argument, so the presence of subject expletives is not permitted. However, examples such as (24) are not rare; the conclusion has thus been that a thematic Pred cannot be involved in such instances. Our analysis does not raise this problem since crucially, σ is not a thematic, but a discourse projection. It is therefore irrelevant to the expletive/non-expletive nature of arguments that are generated in its Specifier position. Thematic restrictions on depictives, if they are universal, are due to other constraints, such as the semantics of the predicate XP, for instance.

This brings us to the semantic type of Pred, which was seen by Bowers as a category creating predicates of type $\langle e,t \rangle$. However, Matushansky correctly observes that AP/NP/PPs can be categories of type $\langle e,t \rangle$ even in the absence of Pred. If this were not the case, it is not clear how adjectives could be used as modifiers with an attributive function in a non-stipulative way, while sustaining the hypothesis that attributive adjectives are not a predicative category. We agree with Matushansky that the AP in both its attributive and predicative use is of the same type. As we have argued here, it is AP’s merge with σ that results in a syntactic predicate.

In sum, our analysis has the benefits of Bowers’ account without the Theta and Case problems introduced by Pred and noted by Matushansky, or the disadvantages of a classic small clause analysis.

6. Conclusion

Our identification of the head of small clauses as σ is part of a larger analysis of secondary predicates. We have proposed that all predicates have as their head an element with discourse-related properties: a stage head σ consisting of time and place coordinates. In the case of the depictive predicate, these coordinates are unvalued and must be specified by the higher discourse Anchor σ .

Our proposal offers a simple account of the event-related properties of depictives, that is, the temporal simultaneity and the stage-level restriction on the DPred. Other accounts, such as complex-predicate analyses (see Larson 1991, Pylkkänen 2008, Irimia 2012, 2014, a.o.), or small clause analyses (e.g. Bowers 1993, Stowell 1983, 1991, a.o.), must stipulate one or both of these properties. Unlike previous accounts, the analysis

presented here allows for the accurate structural representation of the thematic relations among the verb, object, and the secondary predicate in depictive constructions.

Moreover, our proposal as to the nature of the depictive predicate is not construction-specific, but follows from a general theory of the nature and structure of syntactic predicates. We thus account for a range of predicate constructions in general including, as we have shown, the stative predicate of small clause constructions and the stative depictive construction. The range of interpretations of the different construction types is possible, we have claimed, due to the σ head and to the flexibility of σ valuation.

The analysis presented here is thus a successful first step toward a unified account of secondary and primary predicates and the interactions between them.

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