**Where does predication come from? Some preliminary thoughts and insights from emerging languages**

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Predication is a semantic relation that underlies very basic semantic and syntactic terms, such as *proposition*, *assertion,* *truth value* and *clause/sentence*, yet it is hard to find a precise definition of the norion. Predication is a relation between two entities different in nature, a subject and a predicate. Therefore predication is an asymmetric relation. Predication builds on compositionality, but it adds a specific meaning that distinguishes the resulting unit from other compositional units such as phrases and compounds (e.g., the distinction between 'The bird is black', 'a black bird' and 'a blackbird'). This specific meaning is hard to define, but a sense of 'aboutness' is involved: the predicate adds information that is 'about' the subject. The purpose of the talk is to examine questions about the notion of predication and put forth some preliminary thoughts and hypotheses by looking at how predication is expressed in emerging and young languages. I will focus on the 'aboutness' sense of predication, and suggest that a possible source for the emergence of predication structure in language is expressions involving an explicit evaluative component, conveying the addressor's attitude towards an entity or a situation.

Predication is expressed formally in language in two types of syntactic structures: subject-predicate structure (and the various ways it is marked in languages, e.g. by case systems and subject-verb agreement systems) or topic-comment structure. From a functional perspective, predication enables displacement, the disassociation of the linguistic message from the 'here and now', as it encodes the separation of entities from the situations they are found in (cf. Bickerton 1990).

Predication is regarded as universal in language. Yet Gil, in a number of recent publications (2012, 2014), suggests that not all languages grammaticalize predication to the same degree, and that in young languages (in particular, though not exclusively), such as creoles and sign languages, predication is either weakly grammaticalized or completely absent.

Where did this relation come from? Castairs-McCarthy (1999) suggests that predication is built on the neural machinery that underlies CV syllable-structure. Krifka (2008) points to some similarities between the principles of bimanual coordination, specifically the functional asymmetry between the two hands in manipulating tools, and the way we manipulate information in communication. He suggests that bimanual coordination might have been a pre-adaptation for the development of topic-comment structure. Gil (2012, 2014) addresses the issue of possible routes for the grammaticalization of predication, suggesting that it is the result of recurrent alignment between two more basic conceptual notions – thematic role assignment and headedness. All three analyses do not address the question of where the 'aboutness' sense comes from. A good place to look for the origins of this sense is by following the emergence of predication structures in new languages.

I report here on a preliminary study of a twelve-minute narrative of a first generation ISL signer, telling her life story – her childhood in Algeria, her journey to Israel and the first years in Israel. The narrative was parsed into content units (according to general discourse themes), and all units consisting of two parts, the second interpreted as saying something 'about' the first, were extracted. These units were analyzed according to their internal structure.

The analysis shows that many of the units do not have a clear predicative form, which seems to support Gil's claim the predication is not universally attested in language. Such units contain chains of signs with no clear 'aboutness' structure, as in (1), where it is very difficult to identify a predication structures:

1. RAIN RAIN ROCKING ROCKING ROCKING HARNESS HORSE EXACTLY 'It was raining hard and the boat was rocking, they put harnesses on us, like horses.'

The interpretation of this sign stretch depends on additional knowledge not expressed in the narrative. Such stretches were quite abundant in the narrative.

Clear subject-predicate constructions that consist of a predicate word and its external argument, as in (2-5) are very rare in the narrative (less than twenty).

1. I SCARED. 'I was scared.'
2. MUNICIPALITY MONEY GIVE 'The municipality gave money.'
3. FIRST-BORN HEARING STUDY 'The oldest (boy), hearing, studied (in school).'
4. I SISTER I WEDDING GO. 'My sister and I went to a wedding.'

Much more common are units that can be regarded as topic-comment structures. Several types of such structures were found:

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| **Topic** | **Comment** | **Example** |
| 1. Patient argument | Action/state word | GOLD SILVER JEWLRY - SELL '(We) sold our gold and silver jewelry.' |
| 1. Entity | Spatio-temporal expression | TOILET – OUTSIDE 'The toilet was outside.' |
| 1. Spatio-temporal expression | Action/state word | FRANCE – STAY TWO-YEARS '(We) stayed in France for two years.' |
| 1. A unit (denoting entity or event) | Negation word | FOOD – NOT EXIST 'There was no food' |
| 1. A unit (denoting entity or event) | Evaluative expression | GIVE FOOD CHILDREN – IMPORTANT 'It is important to give children food.'  MARRY, GO – WONDERFUL 'That (she) got married and went away is wonderful.'  FOOD – TERRIBLE 'The food was terrible.' |

The expression of the patient argument was much more frequent than the expression of the agent argument (similar findings were reported of homesign systems, Goldin-Meadow & Mylander 1998). Gil suggests that predication may become grammaticalized by frequent association of the external argument assignment and headedness (of the predicate). The findings reported here suggest that this developmental path cannot start in very early stages of a language, in which the expression of the external argument is quite rare. Grammaticalization of predication, then, must involve a first stage in which external arguments are more frequently expressed. This characteristic is found more often in second generation ISL signers.

However, the expression of 'aboutness' can occur even before the external argument's expression becomes widespread. Examples (d-e) are especially interesting in that regard. They contain an expression denoting an entity or an event and an expression of the attitude of the addressor towards it (including negating it). These two units are inherently different: the first refers to entities or events in the world, and the second expresses evaluation. Such expressions are therefore inherently asymmetrical and also have an inherent 'aboutness' sense, since the evaluation is of or about an event. These units, then, may constitute a possible source for the emergence of predication, specifically the 'aboutness' sense involved in predication. Crucially, such a structure does not involve thematic-role assignment or predicate-argument structure, and therefore is not dependent on the explicit mentioning of an external argument. I suggest that when a communication system has words for entities and situations on the one hand, and for emotional and evaluative expressions on the other, the combination of these two inherently different elements results in a unit that involves an 'aboutness' sense, providing an initial template for formalizing predication.

Going back to the question of what ingredients are defining properties of language, I claim that the ability to create units with an 'aboutness' sense between its components is central. But this does not mean that all expressions in a given language need to have this characterization, nor does it mean that this relation has to be encoded by morphosyntactic means in the language. That is, the syntactic encoding of predication is not a necessary ingredient of language. But to achieve the communicative and functional flexibility of language, a communication system must have the ability to overtly express predication relations.

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