

The semantics of similarity

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In English, the word *as* can be used to equate degrees or properties (when associated with an adjective) and times or manners (when associated with a verb), as well as individuals and properties in other constructions. And this polysemy isn't idiosyncratic: languages tend to co-opt the same grammatical morpheme to mark similarity across lexical categories and semantic types (Haspelmath and Buchholz 1998).

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| (1) | a. | A is as tall as B | <i>degrees</i> |
| | b. | A is white as snow | <i>properties</i> |
| | c. | A danced as B sang. | <i>times or manners</i> |
| | d. | Think of her as your teacher. | <i>individuals</i> |
| | e. | I've had to quit, as you know. | <i>propositions</i> |

In this lecture series, I will examine how similarity is grammatically encoded across constructions and languages, with a focus on the compositional semantics of these forms. In the first lecture (The Typology of Equatives), I will present a crosslinguistic typology of equatives, similar to Stassen (1985)'s and Beck et al. (2009)'s typology of comparatives. In the second lecture (The Semantics of Similatives), I will discuss verbal and propositional similatives, their morphosyntactic differences from equatives, and their semantics (in particular, how verbs come to be associated with times and manners, and how possible worlds are incorporated into *as if* constructions). In the third lecture (The Semantics of Equatives), I will present a compositional degree semantics of two subclasses of equative constructions, with a focus on how they interact with comparatives and measure phrase constructions for the purposes of implicature calculation. The aim of the series is to have a better understanding of how equatives work in natural language, with the ultimate goal of having a better understanding of the nature of degree relations (including comparatives) and semantic cross-domain parallels.

References

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