Natural language sentences are generally viewed to syntactically consist of a predicate and its arguments, whereby the predicate may correspond either to a primitive lexical item or to a complex expression derived by lexical and/or syntactic rules. It is often claimed that every predicate denotes some sort of eventuality and that the syntactic arguments of the predicate are in a particular way semantically related to the denoted eventuality: every argument is analysed as being associated with a certain semantic role in such a way that the argument expression will be interpreted as denoting a participant playing this semantic role in the respective eventuality. The particular kind of semantic role an argument plays is dependent upon grammatical rules linking syntactic arguments with semantic roles as well as upon the sort of eventuality denoted by the predicate. If the predicate denotes a (dynamic) event, its argument(s) will be associated with the role of one event participant such as ‘actor/causer’, ‘patient/undergoer’, ‘benefactive’ etc. The subject of (1) denotes an individual participating in the give-a-talk event as an actor:

(1) The linguist from India is giving a talk

If the predicate does not denote an event, but rather a state, then the semantic role played by the argument’s denotation is different in nature – labels such as ‘holder’ or ‘bearer’ have been suggested to characterise the “participant of a state”, as in (2) ¹:

(2) The linguist from India is an invited speaker

The present paper aims at showing that there are natural language sentences which it is not reasonable to think of as denoting eventualities at all – such sentences do neither denote events, nor states. The claim is that categorising sentences such as (3) and taxonomy sentences such as (4) do not denote eventualities. An alternative semantic treatment will be outlined.

(3) The linguist from India is a phonologist
(4) Phonologists are linguists

The subject of a taxonomy sentence like (4), to begin with, names an object type, the predicate nominal names a second object type and the sentence as a whole reports on an “underlying map” (Macnamara et al. 1994) from the former type to the latter type: (4) states that every possible instance of the type PHONOLOGIST is at the same time an instance of the type LINGUIST. By contrast, the subject of a categorising sentence like (3) denotes an instance of the object type named by the head noun of the subject phrase, the predicate nominal names a second object type and the sentence as a whole states that the referent instantiating the former type at the same time instantiates the latter type: (3) states that there is an instantiation of the type LINGUIST (namely the linguist from India) and that the underlying map from PHONOLOGIST to LINGUIST is relevant in the sense that it can be concluded that the linguist from India is not only an instantiation of the type LINGUIST but even of the (more specific) type PHONOLOGIST.

Thus, predicates of taxonomy sentences and categorising sentences are type-denoting (better: type-naming) rather than particular-denoting. The predicates of (1) and (2), by contrast, denote eventualities, i.e. particulars.

The syntactic argument of a type-naming predicate must somehow be semantically related to the type. Otherwise the semantic composition would fail. For taxonomy sentences this is straightforward since the subject itself is purely type-naming. Little as the formulation buys, one could say that the denotation of the subject of a taxonomy sentence plays the role of a ‘subtype’ of the type denoted by the predicate. For categorising sentences with particular-denoting subjects the situation is more interesting. In order to identify the

¹ Note, by the way, that so-called "dynamic states" (Bach 1986) denoted by verbal predicates like sit, lie, sleep etc. go with events rather than states.
relation among types in these cases, we must pick up an argument made in Macnamara et al. 1994 (see also Xu 1997, Carey & Xu 1999). According to these authors, reference to particulars always must be accompanied by the specification of a type. “[P]eople do not have conceptual access to bare particulars, or attribute-free individuals” (Xu 1997). On this view, every referring expression is by necessity typed (even proper names!) 2. Adopting this argument, one could say that the subject of a categorising sentence denotes an instantiation of the type it is typed with, whereby this type plays the role of a ‘supertype’ of the type named by the predicate.

This view complicates (in a welcome way) the semantic analysis of state-denoting sentences like (2). We say that the subject denotes an instantiation of the object type LINGUIST (furthermore characterised as being from India), the predicate nominal denotes an instantiation of the object type INVITED SPEAKER, the predicate nominal together with the copula forms the predicate-as-such denoting a state and the subject referent participates in this state as a ‘holder’. At least, event-denoting sentences such as (1) can be characterised as follows: The subject denotes an instantiation of the object type LINGUIST (furthermore characterised as being from India), the predicate denotes an instantiation of the event type GIVE A TALK (i.e. denotes an event) and the denotation of the subject participates in the event denoted by the predicate as an ‘actor’.

In sum, in order to adequately capture the semantic properties of taxonomy and categorising sentences, it is proposed that every contentful linguistic expression is first of all (=lexically) purely type-naming 3. From such a type-naming expression a particular-denoting expression can be derived. If this is done, the particular-denoting expression will be typed by the type from which it is derived such that the particular-denoting expression refers to instances of the type it is typed with. Two sorts of types are assumed to be linguistically relevant: object types (named by nominals) and event types (named by verbs). Instantiations of object types are objects, instantiations of event types are events. To characterise a predicate as eventuality-denoting (as containing a referential event or state argument in its semantic structure) makes sense only for particular-denoting predicates. Since a denoted eventuality is a necessary prerequisite for a syntactic argument to be semantically related to the predicate via semantic roles such as ‘actor’, ‘undergoer’, ‘benefactive’, ‘holder’ etc., it must be concluded that the argument of a type-naming predicate cannot be associated with one of these canonical semantic roles.

Thus, the present proposal rejects the often held view that every kind of predication is eventuality denoting. Taxonomy sentences and categorising sentences are not. This implies that not every kind of syntactic argument can be analysed as semantically bearing one of the canonical event-related roles. Drawing a line of demarcation between type-naming predications on the one hand and eventuality-denoting predications on the other hand is not a new idea. Virtually the same has been suggested in Bulygina 1982 for Russian. Bulygina’s “qualities” (kaÿestva) correspond to type-level predications, whereas her “appearances” (javlenija) correspond to eventuality-denoting predications.

The present proposal furthermore offers a new semantic analysis for the range of linguistic phenomena discussed in the literature under various labels such as “essential property assignments”, “genericity markers”, “generic constructions”, “individual-level predications” and the like. Turkish verbs marked by the Aorist, Spanish predicates formed by means of the copula ser and Modern Hebrew predications realised along the lines of the so-called +Pron construction are arguably type-naming predications. Indeed, it can be shown that every instance of a Hebrew +Pron sentence can be traced back to either a taxonomy sentence or a categorising sentence. In order to do so, systematic lexical semantic differences between nouns, verbs and adjectives must be taken into account. Only verbs and nouns are sortals and by themselves have the capacity to name object types or event types, respectively. Adjectival descriptions are non-sortal descriptions which must be conceptually enriched in an accommodation process in order to supply the required type (see Muller-Reichau 2003).

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2 These authors criticise standard Formal Semantics in its commitment to bare particulars.

3 Ignoring proper names.
REFERENCES


