From properties to predicates; from projections to propositions

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In this paper we propose a notion of predication which is unitary and relevant both for primary and secondary predication, which is correlated with a particular predicational mechanism that is expressed syntactically in a PredP, and which is non-inclusive, meaning that not everything that has been subsumed under predication is predication in the proper sense favored by our analysis.

Concerning the latter, we first argue against the claim, common in logical semantics, that attributive and predicative adjectives should both be analyzed as expressing predication. Here we exploit the distinction between junction and nexus (Jespersen 1924), arguing that only the nexal relation (e.g., predicative adjectives, but not attributive adjectives) expresses predication proper. Among other things, we show that the fact that attributive adjectives can be stacked whereas predicative adjectives cannot (a small German car vs. *the car is small German), follows from this analysis.

Next, focusing on the predicational mechanism itself, we essentially adopt an analysis in terms of predication operator and propositional function (e.g., Bowers 1993), which claims more specifically that a predicate is formed from a property element by means of a predication operator that turns a property item into a propositional function, that is, an unsaturated predicate. We then show (i) that the EPP follows from the workings of predication, (ii) that the non-existence of expletive PRO follows from the same, and (iii) that the unitary mechanism of predication that we argue for is syntactically accommodated in a PredP both in primary and secondary predication.

Concerning (i), the EPP, we show that proposition formation necessarily means that a subject argument position must be created whether the subject is contentful or not. Thus, the existence of the EPP is derived from proposition formation, i.e., ultimately from the workings of the predication operator. Among other things, deriving the EPP from predication explains why an EPP requirement is restricted to subject positions only (Rothstein 1995). All natural languages have this EPP requirement, but its effects can be observed as phonetically realized expletive subjects in certain languages only, namely in those that license overt expletive subjects.

Concerning (ii), the non-existence of expletive PRO, we argue that a subject (or actually any argument) must be licensed either formally (e.g., Case) or semantically (e.g., semantic role). For instance, expletive small pro and visible expletive subjects are formally licensed only, whereas PRO is semantically licensed only. We argue that expletive PRO is prohibited because it is a subject that is licensed neither formally nor semantically, cf. *It is nice to snow vs. It is nice that it snows. The crucial premise is that there is an EPP requirement in the first place, which in our analysis is derived from the workings of predication. Related to this is the fact that a subject position cannot be non-existent, a fact that is directly predicted by our analysis.

Concerning (iii), we offer an analysis of some of the intricacies of small clauses, seeking to explain the structure of small and full clauses on the basis of the same predicational mechanisms accommodated in PredP, and simultaneously explaining the differences. The PredP structure that we assume is a rudimentary structure with a simple inherent semantics. This makes it very useful for the language faculty, as PredP can serve as a fundamental building block for all types of predicational structures, among these copular clauses and small clauses. These two construction types are often headed by designated predicational elements, such as verbal or non-verbal copulas (or predication particles). Although we will mention and discuss verbal copulas in our talk, we will focus mainly on small clauses headed by non-verbal copulas. These structures are either selected e.g. by a matrix verb, in which case the specific particle is also selected (cf. (1a-c); Starke 1995). Note also the expletive (or rather cathaphoric) subjects occurring in these small clause structures; pointing to the fact that even small
clauses have expletive subjects and hence a proper subject requirement unrelated to finiteness or tense (cf. also *We made it a bit colder in the living room*).

(1)  
(a) Ich betrachte es als / * für / * Ø gut, dass...  
(b) Ich halte es *als / für / * Ø gut, dass...  
(c) Ich finde es *als / für / Ø gut, dass...

'I consider it as / for / Ø good that...'

These particles (English *as*, German *als*, Norwegian *som*, Russian *kak*) are often described as prepositions, but in fact they are clearly different from these, as these predication particles, unlike prepositions, never impose particular case features onto their complements, but typically inherit the case of their predication subject. Such small clauses (SC) even occur as adjuncts, as their rudimentary semantics allows them to serve as almost any type of adverbial. These adjunct SCs are clearly very sensitive to the syntactic adjunct position they occur in, but they also interact with tense, mood/modality and aspectual marking of the matrix clause for their apprehended meanings. The SC predicate’s status as stage-level or individual-level (Carlson 1977) also plays a part, e.g. in causal v. temporal readings.

(2) (a) [Som student] fikk Jon alltid rabatt på fly. (temporal /causal)  

'As a student, John always obtained a discount on flights.'

(b) [Som student] får Jon alltid rabatt på fly. (causal)  

'As a student, John always obtains a discount on flights.'

(c) [Som student] ville Jon alltid ha fått rabatt på fly. (counterfactual)  

'As a student, John always would have obtained a discount on flights.'

(d) [Som vert] / [Som alkoholiker] sier jeg alltid skål og velkommen. (temporal/causal)  

'As the host / Being an alcoholic, I always say cheers and welcome.'

When stacking these constructions, their stacking and extraction behavior point to what might be a universal adverbial hierarchy *Causal > Temporal > Locative > Manner > V* consistent with scope-based or other hierarchical approaches to adverbial stacking; Cf. also Pittner & Frey (1998, 1999), Pittner (1999), Haider (2000) and Ernst (2002, 2014). The readings arising from these structures when occurring as adjuncts cannot solely stem from the predicational structure itself, their semantics is too underspecified to trigger readings as *causal, temporal, or manner*. Instead, the adverbial positions where these structures occur clearly determine the possible readings of the predicational structure at hand.

(3) Er war [causal als Muttersprachler] schon [temporal als 17-Jähriger] [locative bei Siemens]  

he was as native.speaker already as 17-year.old at Siemens

[manier als Dolmetscher] angestellt.  

as translator employed

'A native speaker, he was employed as a translator at Siemens already as a 17 year old.'

We argue in our talk that precisely the rudimentary semantics provided by the thus versatile predicational frame is what allows this structure to occur in all these different environments. Hence these structures lend themselves as a diagnostic tool and a building block in the description and analysis for a range of seemingly unrelated phenomena. In our paper we focus on the relative scopes of adjunct secondary predication structures, the underlying similarities between between primary and secondary predication, the subject requirement, and the possible types of silent subjects.