
State/change of state lability and the meaning of verbhood

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Across languages, words with the meanings of adjectives in English (henceforth: property concept lexemes ‘PCLs’, following Thompson 1989) often have translational equivalents that are not adjectival, but nominal or verbal in category (Dixon 1982; Thompson 1989; Hengeveld 1992; Bhat 1994; Wetzer 1996; Stassen 1997; Beck 2002; Baker 2003). Regardless of the category of the property concept state, all languages however have ways of describing changes *into* states, which generally bear some derivational relation to the word describing the state the change is into, e.g., *redden*, where the suffix *-en* relates the PCL *red* to the word describing a change into it.

More specifically, PCLs exhibit three types of derivational relationship to words describing changes into them. The first, where change of state is derived from the static state, is exemplified by English, e.g., stative *red* versus change-of-state *redden*. The second, where both state and change of state are derived from a bound root, which we call “equipollent” (cf. Haspelmath 1993) is found for example in Ulwa, where e.g., stative *yam-ka* ‘good’ and change-of-state *yam-naka* ‘get better’ are separately derived from a common bound root *yam-*. The final type is “labile”, where there is no surface morphophonological difference between state and change of state lexemes. This type is illustrated for example by Tongan (Koontz-Garboden 2007:117), where e.g., the *loloa* ‘long’ can be either stative or change-of-state, depending on context. It is this relationship that is the focus of our talk.

Previous work, based on either convenience samples of languages or individual ones, suggests a link between the categorizing of PCLs as verbs in a language and a labile relationship between the PCL and the associated change of state form (Koontz-Garboden 2005, 2007; Matthewson et al 2015). In this talk, we provide more explicit and systematic crosslinguistic evidence using the database “Verbal Roots Across Languages” (<https://verbal-roots.la.utexas.edu>) for this claim, arguing that our results show that only verbs can describe changes of state (when defined as in this talk), as opposed to nouns or adjectives, which cannot, shedding light on the correlation between PCL category and change of state derivation.