Propositions vs. States-of-Affairs

Convenors
Kasper Boye & Marie-Louise Lind Sørensen, University of Copenhagen

Aim
This workshop aims at bringing together linguists of different orientations and with different research focuses in order to furnish our understanding of contrasts between Propositions (truth-valued predications) and States-of-Affairs (non-truth-valued predications).

Background
The distinction between Propositions and States-of-Affairs (SoAs) can be characterized in terms of truth-value: Propositions are truth-valued predicational meaning units, while SoAs are non-truth-valued. The distinction plays a central role in language philosophy and metaphysics (e.g. Loux 1998). In linguistics, it has been employed in several frameworks and by a variety of scholars – although under different names:

Proposition
"Proposition" (Lyons 1977; Ransom 1986; Svenonius 1994; Loux 1998)
"Propositional content" (Dik & Hengeveld 1991)
"Fact" (Lees 1960; Vendler 1967; Dixon 2006)
"Third-order entity" (Lyons 1977)

State-of-affairs (SoA)
"State of affairs" (Svenonius 1994; Loux 1998; Dik & Hengeveld 1991)
"Event" (Vendler 1967; Ransom 1986)
"Action" (Lees 1960)
"Activity" (Dixon 2006)
 "Second-order entity" (Lyons 1977)

Pertaining to predicational meaning units, the distinction is relevant to clause contrasts (including nominalizations). It has been used to capture contrasts between different complement types of, for instance, modal predicates (1), perception predicates (2), knowledge predicates (3), and utterance predicates (4)

(1) Modal complements (e.g. Lyons 1977; Palmer 1979;Perkins 1983)
    He may stay in that house.
    a. 'It is possible for him to stay in that house'.   **(SoA reading** of complement)
    b. 'It may be the case that he is staying in that house'.   **(Prop. reading** of complement)

(2) Perception complements (e.g. Dik and Hengeveld 1991: Boye 2010a)
    a. *I saw [him write a letter].*   **(SoA complement)**
    b. *I saw [(that) he was writing a letter].* **(Propositional complement)**

(3) Knowledge complements (Sørensen & Boye 2015) (data from Jacaltec; Craig 1977: 241, 235)

    a. *Wohtaj [hin   watx'en kap   camixe].*   **(SoA complement)**

I.know I.make ? CLF/DET shirt
'I know how to make shirts'.
   b. *Wohtaj [tato   ay tzet ch'alaxoj   jet   bay   chon toj tu'].*(**Prop. complement**)
    I.know COMP   is what is.given   to.us where we.go ?   that
    'I know that they will give us something where we are going'.

(4) a. *I told him [to go].*   **(SoA complement)**
   b.*I told him [that she didn't like him].*   **(Propositional complement**)

It has been used to capture contrasts between different kinds of nominalization, as in (5) (e.g. Lees 1960; Vendler 1967):

(5) a. *her singing of the aria* **(SoA nominalization**)
   b.*her singing the aria*   **(Propositional nominalization**)

Importantly, the distinction has been associated with the distinction between the "major sentence types" declarative, interrogative and imperative. It has been argued that imperatives involve SoAs, while declaratives and possibly also interrogatives involve propositions (see Boye 2012: 199-206 for discussion). The distinction is of relevance not only to clause type contrasts, however. Certain nouns may be described as designating SoAs, while others may be described as designating propositions. Moreover, verb- or clause-level semantic categories may be distinguished according to whether they relate to propositions or SoAs. For instance, manner adverbs and non-epistemic modality are associated with SoAs (e.g. Hengeveld 1989), while it has been argued that evidentiality and epistemic modality are associated with propositions (Boye 2010b, 2012). Proposition-SoA contrasts are arguably pervasive in the world's languages. Still, however, they remain heavily understudied.

Topics and issues covered
1) Proposition-SoA contrasts in individual languages,or language families or across language families: e.g. nominalization contrasts, noun contrasts, contrasts in complement, adverbial and/or relative clauses.

2) Modelling the Proposition-SoA contrast:
Is a cognitive linguistic conception of the Proposition-SoA contrast preferable to a denotational one (as argued in Boye 2012), or vice versa, or is there an alternative to both of these options?

3) A typology of Proposition types and/or SoA types:
Can different types of Proposition types and/or SoA types be distinguished? For instance, is a distinction between fact- and non-fact propositions linguistically significant? How is the notion of SoA related to action types (Aktionsarten)?

4) Interaction with other semantic or grammatical categories:
What is the relationship between the Proposition-Soa distinction and distinctions such as that between realis and irrealis? What is the relationship between the Proposition-SoA distinction and distinction between types of evidentiality or epistemic modality?
Cristofaro (2003) suggests that the Proposition-SoA distinction is related to the distinction between balanced and deranked dependent clauses. Similarly, Harder (1996) argues that the distinction is related to the distinction between tensed and non-tensed clauses. Is this the case? If so,why?

References

Boye, K. 2012. *Epistemic meaning*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.

Boye, K. 2010a. Reference and clausal perception-verb complements. *Linguistics* 48:2. 391-430

Boye, K. 2010b. Evidence for what? Evidentiality and scope. *Sprachtypologie und Universalienforschung* 63.4. 290-307.

Craig, C. 1997. *The structure of Jacaltec*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Cristofaro, S. 2003. *Subordination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dik, S. C. & K. Hengeveld. 1991. The hierarchical structure of the clause and the typology of perception-verb complements. *Linguistics* 29. 231-259.

Dixon R.M.W. & A. Y. Aikhenvald. 2006. *Complementation: A cross-linguistic typology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Harder, P. 1996. *Functional semantics: A theory of meaning, structure and tense in English*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Hengeveld, K. 1989. Layers and operators in Functional Grammar. *Journal of Linguistics* 25. 127-157.

Lees, R.B. 1960. *The grammar of English nominalizations*. Bloomington: Indiana University Research Center in Anthropology, Folklore, and Linguistics.

Loux, M. J. 1998. *Metaphysics*. London: Routledge.

Lyons, J. 1977. *Semantics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Palmer, F.R. *Modality and the English modals*. London: Longman.

Perkins, M.R. 1983. *Modal expressions in English*. London: Frances Pinter.

Ransom, E.N. 1986. *Complementation: Its meaning and forms*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Svenonius, P. 1994. *Dependent nexus: Subordinate predication structures in English and the Scandinavian languages*. Dissertation, Santa Cruz: California: University of California at Santa Cruz.

Sørensen, M.-L. L. & K. Boye. 2015. Vidensprædikatskomplementering. *Ny Forskning i Grammatik*.

Vendler, Z. 1967. Linguistics in philosophy. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.