
Basic pieces, complex meanings: Building attitudes in Navajo

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It is crosslinguistically widely-attested for different attitude reports to be distinguished chiefly by their verbs, e.g. *think/denken*, vs. *want/wollen*. In familiar accounts, the attitude verb determines the meaning of the attitude report in its entirety. More recently, however, Kratzer (2006, 2013) and Moulton (2009) have argued that key semantic aspects of English and German attitude reports come from embedded material, not attitude verbs.

I present fieldwork data from Navajo in support of Kratzer and Moulton's compositional account. Navajo sentences in (1) express either belief or desire ((1c) is string ambiguous). Unlike their English translations, however, the Navajo sentences all contain the same verb, *nízin*. I show that *nízin* is not lexically ambiguous between meanings on par with familiar entries of *think* and *want*. Rather, Navajo is a limiting case in the empirical landscape predicted by Kratzer and Moulton: the embedded clause determines all attitude-related meaning and *nízin* only adds the attitude holder.

- (1) a. [Nisneez] **nízin**. b. [Nisneez laanaa] **nízin**.
 1SG.tall 3SG.NIZIN 1SG.tall DESIRE 3SG.NIZIN
 'S/he **thinks** I am tall.' 'S/he **wishes** I were tall.'
- c. [Nisneez dooleet] **nízin**.
 1SG.tall FUTURE 3SG.NIZIN
 (i) 'S/he **thinks** I will be tall.' (ii) 'S/he **wants** me to be tall.'

Crucially, clauses embedded by *nízin* can also function as main clauses with meanings intuitively related to attitudes. E.g., unembedded *nisneez* (compare (1a)) expresses an assertion ('I am tall') whereas *nisneez dooleet* is ambiguous much like (1c), expressing an assertion ('I will be tall') or a priority ('I need to be tall'). I propose that Navajo builds beliefs and desire from *nízin* and operators (assertion, priority) used beyond attitude reports.

References: • Kratzer, A. (2006): Decomposing attitude verbs. Talk at the Hebrew University Jerusalem. • Kratzer, A. (2013): Modality and the semantics of embedding. Amsterdam Colloquium. • Moulton, K. (2009): *Natural selection and the syntax of clausal complementation*, UMass dissertation.