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Clause embedding sound emission verbs

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Vocal sound emission verbs like *scream* often take clausal complements:

- (1) I remember screaming that I wanted him back every night for weeks.
(interview on ABC News, 2013)

In this usage the sounds produced must be *verbal* utterances whose semantic content the clausal complement expresses. The clause cannot report, e.g., the content of a non-linguistic scream:

- (2) The infant screamed {when / ?#that} he was hungry.

In (1), a verb meaning ‘Vocalize in a type x manner’ is extended to also mean ‘Say (content of complement clause) by vocalizing in a type x manner’. What gives rise to this polysemy pattern?

One source of polysemy is *sense indeterminacy*: multiple alternative word senses are consistent with a given reference context (cf. Quine’s 1960 “gavagai problem”; and Erk et al. 2012). Word senses pick out regularities across observed situations, so polysemy results when there are multiple correlated regularities. We hypothesize that the stronger the correlation between senses s1 and s2 across described situations, the more likely that a word meant to denote s1 is interpreted as denoting s2 and thus that s1 and s2 are senses of a single polysemous word. E.g. autohyponymy is common because all upward-entailing contexts consistent with s1 are also consistent with s1’s hypernyms, and all downward-entailing contexts are consistent with s1’s hyponyms. Turning to verbs where s1 is ‘vocalize in a type x manner’, we expect s2 to be an activity that correlates with type x vocalizations. Whenever the vocalizations are human speech sounds (as in (1)) then the specific correlating s2 is the act of saying something by making a type x sound.

References: • Quine, Willard Van Orman (1960): *Word and object*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. • Erk, Katrin, Diana McCarthy, & Nicholas Gaylor (2012): Measuring word meaning in context. *Computational Linguistics*, November, 501–44.