

INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL, STAGE-LEVEL, AND EXISTENTIAL PREDICATES

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Abstract: It is usually assumed that English predicates fall into two classes, individual-level and stage-level. I claim, however, that they fall into three classes, individual-level, stage-level and existential, according to several tests. It is further claimed that the criterion dividing them is a semantic one: existential predicates assert the existence of their subjects while individual-level predicates presuppose the existence of their subjects. Stage-level predicates are basically like the individual-level predicates but show existential-type patterns in certain cases.

Keywords: individual-level, stage-level, existential, English, predicate

1. INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL AND STAGE-LEVEL ADJECTIVES IN ENGLISH

Since works such as (Carlson 1977), (Kratzer 1989), and (Diesing 1992), it is widely accepted that English adjectives fall into two types, with the following properties.

Individual-level adjectives

(I) do not occur in *there*-construction

(1) *There are doctors intelligent.

(II) do not allow existential interpretation of bare plural NP subject, *a NP* subject and can not appear with a *sm NP*¹ subject.

¹ *Some* with the reduced pronunciation is written as *sm*. *Some* and *sm* pattern quite differently. For example, *some* is perfectly all right in (i), as compared to (2c).

- (2) a. Doctors are intelligent. (generic only)
- b. A doctor is intelligent. (generic only)
- c. *Sm doctors are intelligent.

(III) denote permanent properties.

Stage-level adjectives

(I') occur in *there*-construction

- (3) There are people sick.

(II') allow existential interpretation of bare plural NP subject, *a NP* subject and may appear with a *sm NP* subject.

- (4) a. People are sick. (generic and existential)
- b. A man is sick. (generic and existential)
- c. Sm people are sick.

(III') may denote temporary properties.

2. DIFFERENCES AMONG SO-CALLED STAGE-LEVEL ADJECTIVES

Stage-level adjectives do not behave uniformly, however. *Available* and *sick*, both of which are considered to be stage-level adjectives, differ in the following points.

(A) With *sick*, the existential interpretation does not exist unless the subject NP is semantically quite general (uninformative), such as *people* and *children*. With *available*, there is no such restriction².

- (5) a. Firemen are sick. (generic only) cf.(4a)
- b. A fireman is sick. (generic only) cf.(4b)
- (6) a. Firemen are available. (generic and existential)
- b. A fireman is available. (generic and existential)

(B) When a sentence with *sick* is negated, it cannot be construed as negation of existence, i.e. existentially. With *available*, the sentence can be construed as negation of existence.

- (i) Some doctors are intelligent.

² Carlson (1977) gives the following example:

- (i) Passengers are sick.

This sentence can be used with its existential interpretation only by the crew (or possibly one of the passengers) of an airplane, ship, or train with many passengers. In that case, almost everybody would be a passenger and the word *passenger* is semantically general.

- (7) a. Children aren't sick. (generic only)
- b. A child isn't sick. (generic only)
- (8) a. Children aren't available (generic and existential)
- b. A child isn't available. (generic and existential)

(C) Similarly, when a sentence with *sick* is questioned, it cannot be construed as questioning existence. With *available*, the question can be construed as questioning existence.

- (9) a. Are children sick? (generic only)
- b. Is a child sick? (generic only)
- (10) a. Are children available? (generic and existential)
- b. Is a child available? (generic and existential)

The individual-level adjectives pattern with *sick* re (B) and (C), but of course (A) is irrelevant to them, since they only have generic interpretations with bare plural NP subjects and *a NP* subjects.

3. CAN BE V-ED PREDICATES

Adjectives which behave like *available* in these points are very few: *visible* is the only other one I have been able to find. However, several predicates of the form *can be V-ed*, such as *can be found*, *can be seen*, *can be heard*, and *can be discerned* behave like *be available*, while *can be trusted*, which is syntactically identical, behave like individual-level predicates re (I')(II')(III') and (B)(C).

(I)(I') *Can be found* occurs in *there*-construction and *can be trusted* does not:

- (11) a. There can be found firemen.
- b. *There can be trusted firemen.

(II)(II') *Can be found* allows existential interpretation of bare plural NP subject, *a NP* subject and can appear with a *sm NP* subject, but *can be trusted* does not have these properties:

- (12) a. Firemen can be found. (generic and existential)
- b. Firemen can be trusted. (generic only)
- (13) a. A fireman can be found. (generic and existential)
- b. A fireman can be trusted. (generic only)
- (14) a. Sm firemen can be found.
- b. *Sm firemen can be trusted.

(III)(III') *Can be found* may denote a temporary property, i.e. that of being available at the moment of utterance, but *can be trusted* always denotes a permanent property.

(B) When a sentence with *can be found* is negated, it can be construed as negation of existence, but this is not the case with *can be trusted*:

- (15) a. Firemen can not be found. (generic and existential)
 b. Firemen can not be trusted. (generic only)

(C) When a sentence with *can be found* is questioned, it can be construed as questioning existence, but this is not the case with *can be trusted*:

- (16) a. Can firemen be found? (generic and existential)
 b. Can firemen be trusted? (generic only)

4. ASSERTION AND PRESUPPOSITION

It is immediately clear that the predicates which behave like *be available* have a common semantic property: they denote that their subjects exist, or that the existence of their subjects can be perceived (which comes to the same thing, since the only way human beings can learn that things exist is by perceiving them). Therefore the common property shared by them is not a syntactic one, but the semantic property of *asserting* the existence of their subjects. This is why they always have an existential interpretation. I therefore called them existential predicates in Sugiura (1995). The individual predicates, on the other hand, always *presuppose* the existence of their subjects, and the stage-level adjectives basically do so too, but the latter can, in marginal cases such as (4a) and (4b), where the sentence is declarative and positive and the subject is either a bare plural NP or *a NP* and semantically uninformative, be used to assert the existence of their subjects (i.e. be interpreted existentially).

Note, however, that with *can be V-ed* predicates, the stage-level type does not exist, since no *can be V-ed* predicates behaves like *sick* re (A), i.e. have an existential interpretation only when the subject is semantically general:

- (17) People can be fooled/flattered/hit/amused (generic only)

5. VERBS

In the case of verbs, a small subset of ergative (or unaccusative) verbs such as *appear* and *arrive* pattern with the existential predicates, and verbs such as *smile* and *eat* pattern with the individual-level predicates re (I)(I'), (II) (II'), (B) and (C):

- (18) a. There appeared a ghost.
 b. *There smiled a ghost.
 (19) a. Sm ghosts appeared.
 b. *Sm ghosts smiled.
 (20) a. (At a hotel) Guests didn't arrive this afternoon.
 b. (At a hotel) Did guests arrive this afternoon?
 (21) a. (At a restaurant) *Guests didn't eat this afternoon.
 b. (At a restaurant) *Did guests eat this afternoon?

With verbs, too, the stage-level type, i.e. the type which allows existential interpretation of

bare plural NP subject and *a NP* subject only when the subject is semantically general, does not seem to exist. However, with verbs the situation seems to be a little different and much more complicated. For example, it is not clear how (III) should be interpreted regarding verbs, and there exist verbs which can appear in *there*-construction but do not pattern with the existential predicates re (B) and (C). Therefore the classification below is tentative in regard to verbs.

Table 1 Classification of predicate types

	individual-level	stage-level	existential
adjectives	<i>intelligent</i>	<i>sick</i>	<i>available</i>
<i>can be V-ed</i> predicates	<i>can be trusted</i>	(does not exist)	<i>can be found</i>
verbs	<i>smile</i>	(does not exist)	<i>appear</i>

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