The 50th Mie University Linguistics Colloquium

'*good*' as a predicate of worlds

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When: 2018/1/19 (Fri) 16:30-18:00

Where: 人文校舎2階IT講義室

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Abstract:
The topic of this talk are predicative expressions of the form in (1) where the predicate is the adjective "good" and the subject that "good" is predicated of is expressed by a finite clause – in the following: "'good'-predications" for short.

(1)   a.   It is good that the cat is fat.
          b.   It is good if the cat is fat.
          c.   It would be good if the cat were fat.

More precisely, the main interest of this talk is the interpretation of "good"-predications at the syntax-semantics interface (and not so much the details of the lexical semantics of "good").

    In recent work, Daniel Lassiter has argued that the "if"- and "that"-clauses in (1) should be analysed as arguments of the predicate "good" in analogy to an analysis that takes the "that"-clause in (2) to be an argument of "likely", see Lassiter (2017).

(2)   It is likely that the cat is fat.

I argue – contra Lassiter (2017) – that considerations about the syntax-semantics interface of sentences like the ones in (1) lead to the conclusion that the "if"- and "that"-clauses in (1) are not propositional arguments of the predicate "good" but quantifiers over possible worlds that bind a world argument in the subject position of the predicate "good". In a nutshell, I argue that "good" is a predicate of worlds and not propositions.

    I start out by presenting a puzzle.

(3)   **The conditional puzzle of "good"-predications**
        While "good"-predications share the mood matching patterns and the conditions of use of conditionals, they don't share their truth-conditional interpretation.

I will argue that the best way to solve this puzzle is by assuming that there is a hidden modal quantifier in the finite clause of a "good"-predication that can be addressed by the verbal mood – thus accounting for its conditions of use – but doesn't grammatically function as an adverbial (as it does in conditionals) but rather as the argument of the "good"-predication – thus accounting for the difference in truth-conditions.

Reference:
Lassiter, Daniel. 2017. *Graded Modality. Qualitative and Quantitative Perspectives.* Oxford University Press.