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Form-Function Mappings in Copulative Perception Verbs

Copulative perception verbs such as English *look (like)* and *sound* take a stimulus subject and various types of complements. They are established as having two distinct functions: (i) an “attributory” function which attributes a property to a percept (e.g., *It looks wonderful*), and (ii) a parenthetical function which modifies a proposition (e.g., *It looks expensive*) (Gisborne 2010, Melnik 2023). This talk is concerned with the pairing between the different forms in which these verbs occur – specifically the types of complements they take – and their available functions. I will present two corpus studies tackling this problem in a bottom-up approach.

The first study investigates an alternation in Hebrew, between copulative perception verbs with an adverbial complement (e.g., *hi niret matsxik* lit. ‘she looks funnily’) and with an adjectival complement (e.g., *hi niret matsxika* ‘she looks funny’). Based on distinctive collexeme analyses (Gries and Stefanowitsch 2004) of their subject and complement slots, I argue that the adverbial and adjectival forms map one-to-one to the attributory and parenthetical functions, respectively.

The second study, which is still ongoing, investigates copulative perception verbs with clausal complements (e.g., *I smell like I’ve been wrestling a gorilla*), in English and in Hebrew. Preliminary findings challenge the common assumption that this form is invariably parenthetical (Gisborne 2010, Landau 2011, Asudeh & Toivonen 2012), and suggest factors which predict the intended function in context, namely perceptibility of the subject and extravagance of the complement clause.