

Natural classes within attitude predicates: English 'come-to-know' verbs

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This talk, based on joint work with Pranav Anand, is a focused investigation of English 'coming-to-know' verbs, such as "discover", "find out", "figure out", "learn", "notice" and "realize". The main goal is to demonstrate that 'coming-to-know' verbs form a natural class that, apart from puzzles on presupposition projection, has escaped the attention of semanticists. Drawing on the literature on aspect and evidentiality, we argue that (i) these verbs are culmination achievements that denote a change in doxastic state (from agnosticism to belief) that have a distinct profile based on the type of complement they combine with and that (ii) they lexicalize the type of evidence that triggered that change. At least in English, there is no vanilla verb that would just mean 'come-to-know'. This fact shows that a subset of factives belongs to a large group of semantically and syntactically heterogeneous expressions that are sensitive to evidential restrictions, and allows us to connect the growing body of work on fine-grained semantics for attitudes with research on evidence in language.