Workshop: The Diachrony of Valence: Changes in Argument Structure

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Workshop description

Traditionally, argument structure is an integral part of a lexical item's representation encoding the number of arguments the lexical item takes, how the arguments are syntactically realized (e.g. DP, PP, CP) and which semantic roles they instantiate (e.g. Agent, Experiencer, Theme). However, these properties or features are neither synchronically invariable nor diachronically immune to change, especially if a language is affected by large-scale typological shifts (Comrie 2006). A showcase example in this respect is English with its development from syntheticity to analyticity. As a consequence, a drastic increase of labile verbs can be witnessed, i.e. single double-functional verbs whose argument structure varies considerably in that they can be used both with an intransitive and a transitive meaning without any overt formal marking, which makes a classification of English verbs as either transitive or intransitive notoriously difficult (van Gelderen 2011). Also, English has enhanced syntactic means for functions formerly expressed morphologically (e.g. causativity: whereas jan-verbs ceased to be productive, periphrastic markers of causativity have taken their place (van Gelderen 2014, García García 2012; Haspelmath 1993), with the most recent addition being constituted by the V NP into V-ing construction).

This workshop aims at exploring argument structure from a diachronic (and comparative) perspective focusing on the extent and limitation of variation in the lexical representation and/or the (morpho)syntactic realization of a lexical item's arguments. Two types of processes are of prime interest: those that affect a lexical item's argument structure (transitivization and detransitivization) and those that affect the mapping of a lexical item's arguments onto syntax.
1. **Augmentation processes**, for example, involve strategies in which the verbal territory of a verb is more or less systematically extended, as is the case with cognate objects that are etymologically and semantically related to the verb they co-occur with, thus occupying the internal argument position of a verb otherwise not taking direct objects (cf. English *to smile a smile* or Greek *ekhárēsan kharàn megalēn sphōdra* 'they were exceedingly glad with big joy' (cf. Hoeche 2009; Lavidas 2012)), or with 'reaction' objects (cf. English *to grunt one's gratitude*, to wave an adieu (cf. Felser & Wanner 2001; Levin 1993))

2. **Argument reduction processes**, for example, affect typically the highest argument of a lexical item, which will either be absent from the lexical item's argument structure, as in anticausatives (cf. German *Eis schmilzt schnell* 'ice melts fast') and middles (cf. English *bananas peel easily*), or morphologically 'saturated', as is the case in canonical passives (cf. French *il était tué* 'he was killed' or Norwegian *alt for mye kastes* 'too much is thrown away' (cf. Schäfer 2008, Julien 2007, Klingvall 2007, Steinbach 2002, Lødrup 2000)).

3. **Argument mapping and remapping** becomes evident in syntactic variation, cases in point being complementation patterns (e.g. nominal vs. sentential complements, double object constructions, complements of adjectives), (non)canonical subjects (e.g. quirky subjects, expletive and locative constructions), etc. These phenomena often result from the interplay of changing phonological and morphological conditions, semantic change as well as pragmatic considerations (cf. Abraham 2010, Rudanko 1999, 2011, Hudson 1992, Colleman & De Clerck 2008, Fanego 2007, Hazout 2008, Barðdal 2006).

4. Additionally, since **valence selection** may be organized **paradigmatically** (case morphology contingent also upon aspectual value of (verbal) complement or on the choice between features such as [+/human/+animate]) or **syntagmatically** (either independent of, or contingent upon, linear position in the clause as in Modern English) a shift from paradigmatic to syntagmatic may be a diachronic choice also (cf. Abraham & Leiss 2015).

Against this backdrop, the major questions that this workshop seeks to address are

- which factors, diachronically, have impacted the argument structure of lexical items and induced what types of changes
- what strategies, if any, are employed to formally mark changes in a lexical item's argument structure and/or the mapping of a lexical item's arguments?
which strategies, if any, compensate for the absence of overt morphosyntactic and morphonological cues/marking?

to what extent are cross-linguistic generalizations possible?

On a larger scale, we are interested in the following issues and questions

are there processes that are more (a)typical than others?

are there preferred argument structures? Is there preferred mapping?

argument structure changes in categories other than V and N

why is it that certain types of changes yield (non)uniform results (e.g. argument demotion results in periphrastic passives, morphological passives or middles, whereas argument reduction results in impersonals and anticausatives; reflexivization in both augmentation and reduction processes)

are certain types of adjuncts more prone to reanalysis than others (augmentation of argument structure)?

do labile verbs have labile argument structures?

which types of change affect individual lexical items and which affect classes of lexical items and constructions?

what is the exact interplay of argument structure and event structure (aspect)?

chicken-and-egg questions, e.g. do all changes begin in the lexicon, or can syntax (morphology, semantics, pragmatics) feed argument structure?

descriptions of transitivization, detransitivization, and changes in the mapping

Additional questions are:

Since massive syntactic (multiple) fusion of (directional) prepositions (an/ab/vor/zu/auf/unter/über etc.), on the one hand, and aspectual ge- and simple verbs took place (ver-/ab-/vor-/bei-/zer-/über-/unterREDEN) the question rises to which systematic extent this influenced the valence of the new fused verbs. In particular, did the prepositions themselves a governing category – merge their valence into the resulting fusional complex?

Since prepositional fusion resulted in either (non-focal) prefixal or (focal) particle complexes, and since certain prepositions only yielded focused prefixal morphemes (ver-
SPRECHEN ‘promise’ vs. VORsprechen ‘drop in on’; *anSPRECHEN-ANsprechen), the different results may require different systematic explanations.

- What is behind the generality of directional preposition+verb fusion, but not stative preposition+verb?
- Is it possible to explain case in terms of features and clear form-function relations in the vein of Jakobson 1957?
- Is there any systematics behind case selection of verba deponentia? Consider Latin utor+ABLATIVE, which taken by its diathetic form should represent the original AGENT, but which, in fact, represents the direct object of the deponens verb.
- Speaking in terms of paradigms, how do languages encode causatives as opposed to decausatives, transitives as opposed to detransitives.
- Has there diachronically been a restriction for doubling identical case forms? Consider German jemanden.ACC etwas.ACC lehren; jemanden.ACC etwas.ACC kosten, which are strictly evaded in the spoken dialects. Does this mean that morphological case raises semantic images which are un-alignable with one another in a single clause? But consider also Latin aliquem.ACC Latinam linguam.ACC discere, which was valid throughout Classical Latin (but perhaps not in late vulgar Latin?).
- What L-contact did and does with valence is an unwritten chapter on this topic. Contributions from pidgins and creoles would be highly welcome. This applies equally to French influence in the period of ME.
- Given the common insight that under L-contact (i.e. with pidginization and creolization) grammar is transferred to the recipient L a lot less than semantic-lexical information, what role does semantic valence play in the emerging language? Does it influence linearization in a systematic way (linearization aligning with hierarchies of semantic roles)?
- Bare datives and the pertinent prepositional constituents (as in English): simply linear alignment or semantic difference?
- Is there a particular role laid aside for the reflexive pronominal, either full or as a grammatical suffix, influencing valence emergence synchronically and diachronically? The case of deponens verbs and their semantic case distribution.
- Finally, are there instances of morphological valence encoding that are interacting with phonemic syllable status vs. desyllabification due to phonetic changes?
References


