Continuity and change in argument realization systems

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Argument realisation is one of the most basic and yet one of the most complex dimensions of grammar. Here, the term 'argument' refers to a participant implied by a predicate and 'argument realisation' is understood as the morphosyntactic expression and behaviour of arguments. The notion of 'argument realisation system', in turn, has a broad scope, being intended to include (at least) alignment features (i.e. case and agreement), argumenthood properties and transitivity prominence. Synchronically, most language-specific argument realisation systems show some degree of variation. Diachronically, languages can show fundamentally different argument realisation systems at different historical stages. From a comparative perspective, it is striking that even genetically closely related languages display significant differences in the morphosyntactic expression and behaviour of arguments. Geographically, contact between genetically unrelated languages sometimes results in (partly) converging patterns of argument realisation, often discussed in the context of other areal features characteristic of so-called Sprachbund or linguistic areas. However, it remains unclear in what ways different mechanisms of change interact in the organisation, maintenance and development of language-specific argument realisation systems.

These and related problems have been dealt with to different extents in previous research. For example, alignment typology has been an important strand of research at least since Dixon's (1972) monograph on Dyirbal, which was followed by works like Harris (1985), Plank (1985, 1995), Dixon (1994), Butt (2006), Polinsky (2016), the papers in Coon et al. (2017). Much existing research on alignment adopts a predominantly synchronic perspective, but diachronically oriented studies also exist. These studies have analysed both general mechanisms of alignment change (e.g. beginning with Anderson (1977) and summarized in Zúñiga (2018)) and more specific, language-family-oriented developments, including Iranian (Haig 2008), Indo-Aryan (Dahl and Stroński 2016), Indo-European more generally (Dahl 2021b; see also the papers in Dahl (ed.) 2022), and Amazonian languages (Gildea and Queixalós 2010), to name a few. Works dealing with arguments and argument properties, on the other hand, are less numerous. One line of research explores subjecthood from a typologically oriented perspective, including Falk (2006), Van Valin (2005) and Croft (2012).

Another tradition employs subjecthood properties primarily as heuristics in studies of so-called non-canonical subjects (cf., e.g., Ziv 1976, Cole et al. 1980, Barðdal 2023, Eythórsson and Barðdal 2005, Barðdal et al. 2012, Barðdal et al. 2023, Polinsky 2016, as well as the papers in Aikhenvald et al. (ed.) 2001, Bhaskarao and Subbarao 2004a, 2004b, and Malchukov and Siewierska 2011). Some of these works (Ziv 1976, Cole et al. 1980) note that there is a tendency for non-canonical subjects to acquire syntactic subject properties prior to morphological ones (cf. also Haspelmath 2010). Finally, transitivity prominence was recently introduced as a term by Haspelmath (2015) and the extant literature on this topic is scarce (cf., however, Tsunoda 1985, Bossong 1998, Say 2014, 2017, Creissels 2018b, 2024, Seržant et al. 2022 Dahl et al. forthcoming).

This workshop aims to bring together scholars working on argument realisation and related phenomena. Pertinent research questions include but are not restricted to the following:

- Do some dimensions of argument realisation morphosyntax more strongly tend to undergo change than others? For example, change in basic alignment, typically involving the rise of a new alignment type in specific morphosyntactic contexts, is not uncommonly seen across languages (cf. e.g., Dahl 2016, 2021a). To what extent do, for instance, argumenthood properties and/or transitivity prominence change or remain stable over time?
- Whether or to what extent do different mechanisms of change operate in different dimensions of argument realisation? Again, changes in basic alignment is a sufficiently well-studied phenomenon to constitute a useful point of departure. Various scholars (e.g., Dahl 2016, 2021a, Creissels 2018a, 2024) have noted that alignment change often involves grammaticalization of structures built on non-finite constructions with non-verbal agreement features. While grammaticalization may also be reasonably hypothesised to play a central role in the rise of at least some types of argumenthood properties, for instance control constructions, analogy or generalisation intuitively seems to represent a more plausible mechanism impacting changes in transitivity prominence.
- To what extent do changes in one dimension of argument morphosyntax impact other dimensions? In recent work, Pertica (forthcoming) demonstrates that certain types of alignment-related changes in some cases impact transitivity prominence. This set of problems has not been systematically addressed in the research literature and, consequently, many questions remain open, thus motivating the present workshop.
- A third set of problems the workshop will examine concerns the role of macro- and microtypological similarities and differences in the shaping of argument realisation systems through time. Specifically, a growing body of evidence suggests that grammaticalization processes strongly tend to conform to existing structures and categories, being subject to typological constraints imposed by the grammatical system (cf. e.g., Bhat 1999, Narrog 2017, the papers in Narrog and Heine (eds.) 2018, Narrog and Heine 2021: 225, Goldstein 2022). However, in some cases the rise of new categories, e.g., periphrastic perfects built on the so-called existential or oblique possessive construction of the *mihi est* type, impacts a given language's macro-typological features, resulting in a new, ergative alignment pattern, as is the case, for instance, in Indo-Iranian (cf. e.g., Dahl 2021a with references). In languages with so-called transitive possession verbs of the *habeō* type, on the other hand, the rise of new perfects does not impact their general alignment features. Here too, more systematic research is needed to clarify the interaction between existing typological features and newly emerging constructions.
- Works such as Haig (2008) have shown that areal pressure from accusative Turkic languages can alter the typology of some ergative Iranian languages. Meyer (2017, 2022), in turn, convincingly demonstrated that innovations in certain areas of argument morphosyntax, notably the rise of non-accusative alignment in Armenian, can plausibly be analysed as conditioned by contact with neighbouring languages, in this case Middle Iranian. However, to our knowledge, no studies exist that explore whether or to what extent other dimensions of argument morphosyntax are prone to undergo contact-induced change, so this also remains an open question.

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