

Call for abstracts

Valence orientation in contact: a cross-linguistic perspective

Workshop proposal for SLE 2018 (Tallinn, Aug. 29-Sept. 1) (<http://sle2018.eu/>)

Organizers: Eitan Grossman, Riho Grünthal, and Johanna Nichols

Nichols, Peterson & Barnes (2004) have proposed that a general typological parameter of languages is their VALENCE ORIENTATION – that is, the overall tendency of a language to treat members of causal-noncausal verb alternations in a particular way. In some languages, verbs with meanings like *seat* and *scare* tend to be formally derived from verbs meaning *sit* and *fear* (e.g., Nanai, Lakhota), while in other languages, the direction of derivation is the converse (e.g., Russian, Maasai). Yet other languages tend to treat both members as derived (e.g., Ingush, Hausa), or neither member as derived (e.g., Ewe, Ossetic). This work intersects with Haspelmath (1993, 2017) and Haspelmath et al. (2014), which show that some members of causal-noncausal pairs tend to be coded as causatives, while others tend to be coded as anticausatives. All of the above studies are interested in form-meaning and/or form-frequency correspondences, as are studies conducted in generative frameworks (e.g., Levin & Rappoport Hovav 1995 and subsequent literature).

However, meaning- or usage-based explanations (called ‘**functional theories**’ in Bickel 2015), which appeal to cognitive or communicative biases, may be only one part of an account of cross-linguistic diversity in basic valence orientation or, more broadly, in the coding of causal:noncausal verb pairs. Another possible set of factors is ‘**event-based**’ (Bickel 2015), i.e., historical contingencies that have brought speakers of different languages into contact, potentially leading to convergence, on the one hand, or divergence, on the other. Therefore it is important to directly target the possibility that the distribution of valence orientation across languages is influenced by language contact. Preliminary support for this possibility is found in Haspelmath (1993), which points to a European preference for anticausatives, or Nichols et al.’s (2004) finding that basic valence orientation tends to pattern areally. For example, transitivity languages, which prefer the formal derivation of a causal verb from a noncausal verb, are especially prominent in Northern Asia and in North America, while they are strongly dispreferred in Africa, Australia, and Europe.

Such broad areal distributions are the point of departure for the proposed workshop on **Valence Orientation as a Contact-Influenced Parameter: A Crosslinguistic Perspective**. The hypothesis to be investigated in this workshop is that valence orientation is prone to contact-induced change. This hypothesis still remains to be evaluated on the basis of detailed case studies that specifically target valence orientation in actual contact situations. Indeed, several studies point to the possibility of convergence in valence orientation in certain contact situations.

- Kulikov & Lavidas (2015) point to an areal split within Indo-European, such that verb labiality increased in the western languages (e.g., Romance and Germanic) and decreased in the eastern languages (e.g., Indo-Aryan and Armenian).
- Coptic and Koine Greek, which were in intensive contact in Late Antique Egypt, both developed an increased tendency to labile verbs (Grossman 2017, Lavidas 2009).
- Russian Yiddish has moved away from the Germanic profile towards a strong detransitivizing preference as in Russian, while United States Yiddish has shifted towards a preference for labile verbs as in English (Luchina-Sadan, in prep.), as has Pennsylvania German (Goldblatt, in prep.).

We invite abstracts for 20-minute talks that focus on one of the following (or similar) topics:

1. case studies of individual contact situations that provide a detailed discussion of the valence orientation of the languages in contact, in order to evaluate the extent to which language contact played a role in shaping valence orientation;
2. areal studies of valence orientation;
3. global cross-linguistic studies of valence orientation;
4. valence orientation in pidgins, creoles, or mixed languages;
5. other aspects of valence orientation in the context of language contact;
6. family biases (Bickel 2011 and subsequent literature);
7. relevant methodological issues and questions.

Wordlist approaches have been shown to give sensitive and rigorous measures of cross-linguistic similarity and distance, and we especially welcome abstracts that base the study of languages in contact on existing standard wordlists, such as the list of 18 verb-pair meanings provided by Nichols et al. (2004) (revised in [Nichols \(2017\)](#)), for which roughly 200 languages have already been coded; the 31 verb-pair meanings in Haspelmath (1993) or the 20 verb-pair meanings in Haspelmath et al. (2014); or the 20-gloss list in Nau & Pakerys (2017/in press); or the 31-pair [WATP](#) list. We also welcome contributions that criticize existing wordlists or propose new ones.

Prospective contributors should send us a title and short abstract (maximum 300 words; non-anonymous) by **Monday, Nov. 6**. Earlier inquiries are welcome. Proposals will be reviewed and we will have notification by Nov. 15. If the proposal is successful all participants will need to send in a full abstract by the regular SLE conference deadline of Jan. 15, 2018.

- Bickel, Balthasar. 2013. Distributional biases in language families. In: Balthasar Bickel, Lenore A. Grenoble, David A. Peterson & Alan Timberlake (eds.), *Language typology and historical contingency*, 415-444. Amsterdam: Benjamins
- Bickel, Balthasar. 2015. [Distributional typology: statistical inquiries into the dynamics of linguistic diversity](#). In Bernd Heine & Heiko Narrog (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Linguistic Analysis, 2nd edition*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Goldblatt, Noa. In prep. Coding of causal-noncausal verb pairs in German speech islands: a micro-typology. Unpublished manuscript.
- Grossman, Eitan. 2017. Language-specific transitivities in contact: the case of Coptic. Forthcoming in *Journal of Language Contact*.
- Haspelmath, Martin. 1993. [More on the typology of inchoative/causative verb alternations](#). In Bernard Comrie & Maria Polinsky (eds.), *Causatives and transitivity*, 87–120. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Haspelmath, Martin. 2017. Universals of causative and anticausative verb formation and the spontaneity scale.
- Haspelmath, Martin, Andreea Calude, Michael Spagnol, Heiko Narrog & Elif Bamyacı. 2014. [Coding causal–noncausal verb alternations: A form–frequency correspondence explanation](#). *Journal of Linguistics* 50(3): 587 - 625.
- Kulikov, Leonid & Nikolaos Lavidas. 2015. Reconstructing voice and passive in Proto-Indo-European. In: Leonid Kulikov & Nikolaos Lavidas (eds.) *Proto-Indo-European syntax and its development*, 101-124. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Lavidas, Nikolaos. 2009. *Transitivity alternations in diachrony: changes in argument structure and voice morphology*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars.
- Levin, Beth & Malka Rappaport Hovav. 1995. *Unaccusativity: At the syntax–lexical semantics interface*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

- Luchina-Sadan, Elena. In prep. Causal–noncausal verb alternations in Yiddish in comparison with Russian and German. Unpublished manuscript.
- Nau, Nicole & Jurgis Pakerys. In press. Transitivity pairs in Baltic -- between Finnic and Slavic? In Katarzyna Janić and Nicole Nau, eds., *Correlations of Valence-changing Operations Within and Across Languages*. Thematic issue of *Linguistica Posnaniensis* 58:2. Poznań: Adam Mickiewicz University and De Gruyter Open.
- Nichols, Johanna, David A. Peterson & Jonathan Barnes. 2004. Transitivity and detransitivizing languages. *Linguistic Typology* 8: 149–211.
- Nichols, Johanna. 2017. [Realization of the causative alternation: Revised wordlist and examples.](#)
- WATP. The World Atlas of Transitivity Pairs (2014). Tokyo: National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics. (Available online at: <http://watp.ninjal.ac.jp/en/>)