

Workshop Proposal
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Title: Variation and Grammaticalization of Verbal Constructions

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Workshop description

The workshop focuses on verbal constructions in Germanic languages which display great constructional variation and a high degree of polyfunctionality between lexical, idiomatic and grammaticalized usages. Its aim is to investigate the conditions and interdependencies of such variations and polyfunctionalities. The theoretical and conceptual foundations of the workshop rest upon grammaticalization theory, usage-based constructional approaches, frame semantics and empirical modelling (corpus-based, experimental); the intended scope comprises synchronic as well as diachronic phenomena in any register, communicative type or linguistic variety.

Background and aims

This workshop sets out to explore how the constructionist approach can be utilized for an integrative investigation and description of phenomena such as lexicalization, idiomaticization and grammaticalization of verbal constructions both diachronically and synchronically. In the past decades, these topics have been investigated from several angles and with a number of partially diverging intentions. Among the theoretical approaches, Construction Grammar in particular has met with growing interest and meanwhile has proven to be a suitable tool for tackling synchronic variation as well as diachronic change. The following list assembles a selection of studies in major strands of linguistic investigation relevant for this workshop.

GRAMMATICALIZATION THEORY has accumulated enormous insight into the rise of grammatical categories and formatives and their restructuring in general (Diewald 1997, 2002, 2006, Hopper 1991, Hopper & Traugott 2003, Lehmann 2015, Lehmann, Lima, Soares 2010), and into the development of verbal constructions, e.g. modal and other auxiliaries, in particular (Bybee/Perkins/Pagliuca 1994, Diewald 1999, Kuteva 2001). Studies on mechanisms of change have elucidated the role of contexts, e.g. Himmelmann's 2004 concept of context expansion on three different levels (host-class, syntactic and semantic-pragmatic expansion). These efforts have resulted in the identification of a great number of grammaticalization (auxiliarization) path of verbal constructions.

CONSTRUCTION GRAMMAR, represented by Cognitive Construction Grammar (Goldberg 2006), Radical Construction Grammar (Croft 2001) and Cognitive Grammar (Langacker 2008), has been extremely inspiring in providing tools for modelling gradience in variation and change. Verbal constructions have been investigated within the paradigm of construction grammar from a number of angles including idiomaticization processes as well as argument structure constructions (Boas 2003, Engelberg 2009, Faulhaber 2011, Goldberg 1995, Rostila 2007).

USAGE-BASED APPROACHES (Barlow & Kemmer 2000; Bybee & Hopper 2001; Bybee 2013; Diessel 2015; Langacker 1988; Tomasello 2003) have pointed out that usage is the place to look for variation and change.

EMPIRICAL / CORPUS-BASED APPROACHES have introduced quantitative methods for analyzing constructional functionality and variety synchronically (Stefanowitsch & Gries 2003, Gries 2006, Glynn 2012) and diachronically (Hilpert 2006). These techniques have given rise to detailed studies of verbal constructions, lexicalization and idiomaticization, e.g. Gries 2006 with a corpus-based investigation of the verb *to run*.

Notwithstanding this wealth of studies on many aspects of verbal constructions, there remains a gap insofar as integrative approaches encompassing the full scale of variation between lexical, idiomatic and grammatical usages are still missing. There is neither an inclusive investigation of the motivating forces and of the delimiting structural, semantic or pragmatic features connected with the emergence of lexis or grammar. Nor is there a principled and encompassing framework accounting for the commonalities as well as the differences of individual processes, features and conditions relevant in variation and change.

This is where the workshop sets in. It aspires to determine the relevant aspects for an integrated approach to variation and change, i.e. an approach tackling the “opposed corners” of grammaticalization, lexicalization and idiomaticization alike within one unified framework. At the same time, it aims at providing reliable criteria for distinguishing each semiotic type of construction, namely identifying the essential characteristics of grammatical construction as opposed to “frozen” idiomaticized constructions as opposed to “productive” lexical constructions.

The focus of this workshop is on verbal constructions, which are defined as comprising all elements containing a verbal core with a predicative function (finite and infinite constructions of any size). The following examples serve to indicate the range of phenomena subsumed under this term. (1) to (6) are constructions containing the German verb *bekommen* (‘to get’) as its verbal core element. (1) shows the grammaticalized usage as *bekommen*-passive; (2) and (3) are semi-auxiliary usages with modal and aspectual values; (4) and (5) show fully lexical verbs with their divergent argument or valency structures and verbal meanings, (6) exemplifies an idiomatic usage of the construction *Ärger bekommen* (‘to get into trouble’, literally *to get anger*):

- (1) *Sie bekommt die Haare geschnitten.*
‘She gets her hair cut.’
- (2) *In diesem Job bekommt sie furchtbare Dinge zu sehen.*
‘In this job, she gets to see horrible things.’
- (3) *Sie bekommt das bis heute Abend geregelt.*
‘She will manage to get this done by tonight.’
- (4) *Soviel Milch bekommt einer Katze nicht.*
‘This much milk is not tolerated by / is not good for a cat.’
- (5) *Sie bekommt das Mineralwasser.*
‘She gets the mineral water.’
- (6) *Er bekommt Ärger von seinem Chef.*
‘He gets into trouble with his boss.’

The following examples with the English verb *to run* represent the three classes of usages identified in the study by Gries (2006) via a fine-grained analysis of semantic variation. (7) shows the intransitive use, (8) the transitive use and (9) the more idiomatic use of *run* (examples taken from Gries 2006: 63, 69, 72 respectively):

(7) *Simons had run down to the villa to get help.*

(8) *He ran a finger down his cheek, tracing the scratch there.*

(9) *They were reluctant to appoint sheriffs to protect the property, thus running the risk of creating disturbances.*

Verbal constructions may contain very specific syntactic and topological feature, e.g. German cleft sentences with the structure [Es COPULA NP RELATIVE CLAUSE] or [NP COPULA es RELATIVE CLAUSE] as in:

(10) *Es ist Paul, der immer wieder Workshops organisiert.*

'It is Paul who keeps organizing workshops.'

(11) *Paul ist es, der immer wieder Workshops organisiert.*

'It is Paul who keeps organizing workshops.'

While the cleft construction is highly productive, other verbal constructions have reached the stage of idiomaticization with a fixation of lexical slots, e.g. the expression *mir scheint's* [PERSONAL PRONOUN-DATIVE *scheint es/-s*], which is used parenthetically in the function of an epistemic adverbial:

(12) *Sie haben sich – mir scheint's – bei der Abzweigung verlaufen.*

'It seems they have lost their way at the turnoff.'

Papers

The workshop provides a platform for the discussion of an integrative perspective on variation and grammaticalization of verbal constructions in Germanic languages. Topics and research questions that are raised in the papers (see provisional abstracts) include

- detailed case studies of (sets of) verbal constructions under the perspective of the workshop,
- determination of the factors (structural, functional, pragmatic ...) of variation in the diverging directions of grammaticalization, lexicalization and idiomaticization respectively,
- identification of successive stages of change by their distinctive types of contextual/ constructional conditions, e.g. different types of context expansion,
- elaboration of relevant constructional formats, including levels of schematicity for particular types of variation and grammaticalization,
- investigating the types of connections between (productive) lexical, idiomatic and grammatical meanings,
- establishing grammaticalization paths of verbal constructions as holistic entities.

We hope that a discussion of those questions will contribute to develop an integrative approach on variation and grammaticalization of verbal constructions in Germanic languages.

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