

Round table

The Study of Language Change in the 21st Century: Theories and Tools

Grammatical (re)organization: a constructional approach

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Basic questions:

How do novel (and, possibly, unorthodox) linguistic patterns work their way into the existing system?

i.e.

emergence, changes, and integration of linguistic categories

AND:

What is the locus of such developments?

1.

How do we lose a main clause in conversational language, and **to what effect?**

(Fried 2009, 2010, Machač & Fried 2021, Fried & Machač 2022)

Introduction

- ‘insubordination’ (Evans 2009; Evans & Watanabe 2016; Beijering et al. 2019)
“the conventionalised main-clause use of what, on prima facie grounds, appear to be formally subordinate clauses” (Evans 2007:367)

- What does it look like?

English:

If only you stopped nagging me!

Czech:

Když mně to tak vyhovuje.

‘But [the thing is] I’m happy with it.’

(lit. when/if I’m happy with it)

Jesi mu vůbec nějaký peníze zbyly!

‘[I doubt] he has any money left.’

(lit. if/whether he has any money left)

Introduction

- ‘insubordination’ (Evans 2009; Evans & Watanabe 2016; Beijering et al. 2019)
“the conventionalised main-clause use of what, on prima facie grounds, appear to be formally subordinate clauses” (Evans 2007:367)
- What does it look like?
- Where does it come from?
- What actually changes?
- What motivates/facilitates the change(s)?

Examples from Czech *JESTLI*-clauses ‘if/whether-clauses’

Embedded Y/N questions - bi-clausal structure:

- (1) *ale už tam není, no, [já nevím,] jesi jí někdo zničil*
‘but it’s gone, y’know, [I don’t know] if somebody destroyed it’ **I don’t know if p**

Insubordinate Y/N clauses - monoclausal structure:

- (2) *to bylo celý ta střecha dobouchaná vod krup, [] jesi to tam předtím spravoval někdo*
‘it was, the whole roof was pock-marked from hail, [] I-guess maybe somebody’d tried to fix it earlier’ **I think that maybe p**

- (3) A: *je to nesmysl kvůli baterkám, no*
‘it [= to drag the car to Kolín] doesn’t make sense on account of batteries, y’know’

B: *hmm, to [] esi .. no esi .. esi Otas vůbec má baterku*
‘uh-huh, it [] JESTLI .. well JESTLI .. I doubt Otto even has any battery’

I think that probably not-p

Embedded Y/N questions (ex. 1)

- *Semantics* of main predicate:
‘lack of knowledge’ (Vs of not knowing, asking/finding out, discussing, deliberating/selecting)
- *Substitutability*: **jestli** ‘if’ / **zda** ‘whether’
- *Relative order* of clauses: [main clause_{Topic}] [*jestli*-clause_{Focus}]
- *Compositional meaning*
- *Textual / stylistic restrictions*: none

Two functional variants of (seemingly) one insubordinate form

ex. (2)

ex. (3)

■ informational discourse

Potential Explanation cxn. (EXPL)

- **meaning:** 'I think that *maybe p*'
JESTLI = *explicative* marker
- (**form:** trailing *nebo co* 'or something')
- **pragmatics** (evidentiality/epistem.):
Speaker's *minimal confidence*
- **intonation:** slight *rise*; *inconclusive*
- **phonetics:** *more reduced* speech

■ argumentative discourse

Counter-argument cxn. (ARG)

- **meaning:** 'I think that *probably not p*'
JESTLI = *adversative* marker
- (**form:** augment. negative *vũbec* 'not at all')
- **pragmatics** (evidentiality/epistem.):
Speaker's *high confidence*
- **intonation:** *falling*; *conclusive*
- **phonetics:** *less reduced* speech

... and more:

- interaction of intonation and *negation* in JESTLI-clause
- additional *speech-act functions* of insubordination

Motivating factors & restrictions:

- *Structural*: linear inversion – [if-clause] [main clause]
- *Semantic*: prevalence of the quintessential verb of uncertainty *nevědět* ‘to not know’ in the main clause
- *Referential*: prevalence of speaker as the *subject* of the main clause, i.e. high *frequency* of (já) nevím jestli ‘I don’t know if’
- *Pragmatic*: low informativeness of the main verb
- *Contextual*: dialogical exchanges, esp. Q/A sequences

Summary of interconnected changes:

- **Semantic change:**
 - metonymy-based incorporation of the meaning of ‘uncertainty’
 - **pragmatic strengthening** of subjective (epistemic) attitude
- **Decategorialization:**
 - syntactic complementizer > contextualizer
- **Structural reanalysis:**
 - $[[jestli\ S]\ [main\ S]] > [jestli\ S], ([S])$
- Increase in structural scope:
 - $[jestli\ S] > [jestli\ \{S, XP\}]$

2.

Symbiosis between grammaticalization
& Construction Grammar

Basic assumptions & interests in common:

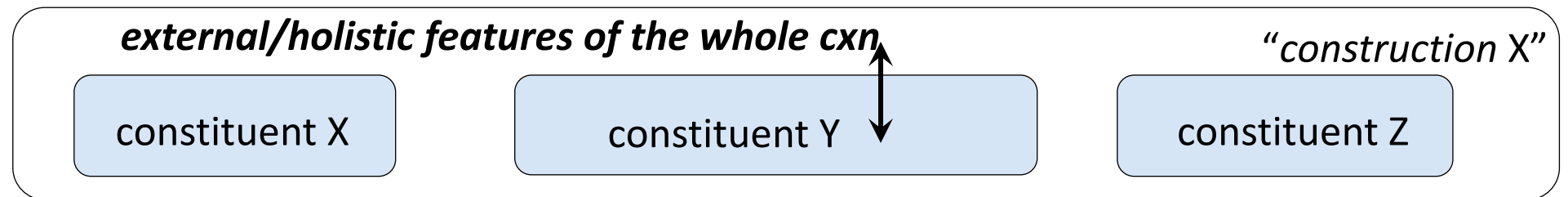
- permanent variability of language
- grounded in speakers' cognitive capacity & communicative practice
 - *language in use* = source of change and variation (e.g. Croft 2000, Traugott 2003):
 - role of **context** and **interaction** in language change
 - focus on **dynamic nature** of grammatical organization
 - interest in **gradualness** of change
 - emergence and reorganization of **complex structures/patterns**
- complex **interaction of multiple factors** that leads to a change in form-meaning associations -- e.g. **JESTLI insubordination**
- even **synchronic** descriptions must cope with **variation** and **transitional patterns**

Construction Grammar

- originally developed for synchronic description of syntax
- extension to diachrony – “diachronic CxG” (e.g. Noël 2006; Barddal et al. 2015)
- **construction** =
 - basic unit of analysis, emerges from **usage**
 - hypothesis about speakers’ **mental representations**, incl. their reorganization
 - **multidimensional** cognitive object -- e.g. *JESTLI: syntax, semantics, pragmatics, phonetics, prosody, discourse setting*
 - locus of **gradual, feature-based, context-induced change** in a complex pattern
 - internally structured

Constructional analysis of language change

- interaction between **internal** make-up and **external conventional** function
→ change(s) in form-function associations



exemplified by **JESTLI**-clauses:

- ✓ tension b. holistic & internal function → increasing **non-compositionality** -- e.g.
 - internally:** *syntax of subordinate Y/N question*
 - vs. **holistically:** *assertion of*
 - *positive uncertainty*
 - *negative certainty*

Constructional analysis of language change

- ✓ reshaping of **internal organization** -- e.g. erosion of constituent structure
bi-clausal > monoclausal structure
- ✓ access to **feature-based** interpretive clues -- e.g.
intonation differences inherited from their bi-clausal source
- ✓ support for Croft's 'radical' claim that **PoS status derives from constructions** – e.g.
syntactic complementizer > discourse contextualizer
- ✓ motivated **integration of new patterns** into constructional networks -- e.g.
 - in epistemic conceptual space
 - in form overlapping with subordinate *jestli*-clauses
 - in form & behavior partially overlapping with 'transitional' bi-clausal *jestli*-structure (defective main clauses 'who-knows', God-'knows')

3.

Current methods and tools

& usage-based commitment of Construction Grammar

Corpus material & methods:

- advantage of **authentic language** use, access to context & co-text (*JESTLI*)
- role of **frequency** in language use and language change (*JESTLI*)
- sophisticated **quantitative analysis** (depends on corpus size)
- insights into mechanisms of the way a **change spreads** through a community (e.g. Petré & Van de Velde 2018)
- expanding availability, size, and specialized coverage :
 - written language (*JESTLI*)
 - spontaneously produced spoken language (*JESTLI*)
 - better tagging, including analyzable phonic information (*JESTLI*)
 - (relatively) rich metadata (*JESTLI*)
 - specialized corpora, e.g. diachronic (*JESTLI*); longitudinal L1 and L2 acquisition

Experimental methods

- testing both production and perception
- relevant for tracing **incipient changes** & **variability**:
 - **acquisitional** approach to language change
 - **phonic** variation in a single speech community
 - **socially** based ('lectal') variation & language change
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Summary & major lessons

- no clear-cut (and useful) division between diachronic and synchronic *focus*
 - good to aim for a **single conceptual and analytic apparatus** for handling both
 - challenge for CxG (or any theoretical approach):
 - develop representational tools for **capturing the dynamic nature** of grammatical organization
incl. **network models** that reflect variability and change
 - challenge for diachronic analyses:
 - **cognitive and social grounding** of language change → changing *speaker's knowledge* over time
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- examples of important topics of language change:
 - development of markers of **non-propositional meanings/functions**;
 - compositional syntactic phrase/morphological form > **non-compositional amalgam**,
semantically unpredictable and distributionally restricted;
 - **morphologization**;
 - specific verb-based valence pattern > generalized, independent schema/cxn;
 - etc.

Thank you!