

2004 International Role and Reference Grammar Conference

Applications of RRG in diachronic syntax

The workshop addresses two topics. The first one pursues to bring together descriptive work on diachronic syntax which has been done in the RRG framework up to day. The second, and central, topic of the workshop aims at highlighting in which way RRG is able to contribute substantially to the examination (maybe also explanation) of processes occurring diachronically in the (morpho-)syntax of diverse languages (or language groups). If we take a look at the global “algorithm” reflecting the linking mechanism between semantic and syntactic representation in RRG (see Fig. 4.9 in Van Valin&LaPolla 1997: 177), we notice that diachronic changes in the grammar (i.e. morphosyntax) of languages can be captured only by the language-specific part of this algorithm and the role played by the Actor-Undergoer-hierarchy (because grammatical rules refer only to macroroles). Languages differ as to the range of specific semantic roles which can be treated as an Actor or an Undergoer. We might therefore ask how language-specific constraints in the treatment of argument positions come about and what triggers them. What we need to capture, then, is the relationship between the Layered Structure of the Clause (as representing language-specific manners of coding) and the structure of lexical entries.

More specific questions as the following ones should thus be discussed during the workshop:

1. Alternations of morphological cases and/or of prepositions and diachronic changes affecting such alternations (is it the lexicon which is under change or rather the rules of the linking mechanism?). In particular, is “exceptional case marking” really exceptional, or is it eventually subject to rules (which may “shrink” or be extended diachronically)?
2. How can discrepancies between syntactic and semantic (in)transitivity be generalized? How can they be explained from a diachronic viewpoint?
3. How do constructions grammaticalize? It is basically the interface between semantic and pragmatic relations and the syntactic organization (the Layered Structure of the Clause, LSC) which is central to the whole theory. In particular, how do ‘restricted neutralizations’ (pivots and controllers) arise?
4. Are certain types of changes in grammatical constructions unidirectional (or tend to be so)?
5. How does a former extra-core slot develop into a part of the Core and, thus, become more tightly integrated into the language’s syntax?
6. In which way does the gradual integration of material from the Periphery and extra-core positions into clausal and core-syntax correlate (and change) with the projection of focus structure?
7. How do prenuclear focus positions arise? Are the first entities to occupy this position always WH words? (Analogous questions could be put regarding other positions of the LSC.)
8. Can we formulate an equivalent of restricted neutralizations for information structure (focus constructions)?

Contributions should last 20-25 minutes (+ discussion time). Abstracts are expected to be sent to the organizer of the conference (Brian.Nolan@itb.ie) and of the workshop (Bjoern.Wiemer@uni-konstanz.de) until March, 15th, 2004.

A more elaborated version of this sketch is available from the organizer of the workshop. Please request!