**Linguistics Graduate Students’ Association Workshop:**

**Cognitive and Usage-Based Approaches to Language**

October 6th 2011

*Senate Chamber, Arts Building, University of Alberta*

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Abstracts

Exemplar semantics: implications for grammatical meaning
Joan Bybee (University of New Mexico)
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In this presentation I outline the basic premises of Usage-Based Theory and show how domain-general cognitive processes give rise to linguistic constructions. I also present the basic features of exemplar models, showing the suitability of exemplar representation for Usage-Based Theory. Focusing on the level of grammatical construction, I argue that constructions change their meaning through inferences and construals made in context and that exemplar representations provide a suitable mechanism for recording and making contextual influences permanent.

The Grammaticalization of Dene Demonstratives
Sally Rice & Chris Cox (University of Alberta)
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The grammaticalization pathways that see demonstratives (and other deictics) potentially developing into personal pronouns, focus particles, nominalizers, relativizers, subordinators, complementizers, or conjunctions (cf. Diessel 1999, Heine & Kuteva 2002), are alive and well in Athapaskan, though these processes are effectively unknown in the typological and Athapaskan literatures. We compare these devices across examples in traditional stories as well as personal narratives in a range of Dene languages and consider other them and similar morphemes that cross the space and time, as well as the noun and verb divide.

References


When three become one: eye movements and fixations in trigram reading
Georgie Columbus\(^1\), Cyrus Shaoul\(^2\), Patrick Bolger\(^1\) & Harald Baayen\(^1,3\)
(\(^1\) Linguistics, University of Alberta)
(\(^2\) Psychology, University of Alberta)
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Multiword units (MWUs) are frequently co-occurring word combinations. These units have often been the subject of psycholinguistic study, in attempts to determine if metaphorical/figurative language is decomposed or accessed holistically. In a recent study Columbus, Bolger and Baayen (2011) found that the type of MWU (e.g., idiom, restricted collocation or lexical bundle) affects the processing of not only the MWUs themselves, but also of other words in sentences which
contain MWUs. This study investigates MWU type effects in reading of short MWUs without context. Each MWU in this study is a trigram taken from the Google Web1T n-gram corpus (Brants & Franz, 2006) using stratified sampling across n-gram frequencies. The trigrams were then coded for MWU type based on the (validated) categories used in Columbus, Bolger and Baayen (2011). Nineteen native speakers of English read the 1000 trigrams while their eye movements were tracked. The results show that MWU effects are visible at the trigram level without a context. Somewhat surprisingly, however, there is also evidence of MWU types affecting processing of the first word in the first fixation duration, and of the first bigram in the subgaze duration. The findings suggest the semantic (and, to a degree, syntactic) make up of MWUs is apparent to the reader from the first word of a trigram. These early effects could potentially be explained by a holistic access theory, or from a co-learning theory based in a naive discriminatory reading (NDR) model (Hendrix and Baayen, 2011).

An investigation of leveling in the strong verb paradigm in English
Kristina Geeraert (University of Alberta)
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Previous research on the strong verb paradigm in English has largely focused on the use of the past participle as the past tense, such as She drank ale or He rung the bell (cf. Bybee & Slobin, 1982; Bybee, 1995; Anderwald, 2007). However, another less-explored levelling pattern is also evident among these verbs, namely the use of the past tense as a past participle, such as I have went there or He has drank the wine (Eisikovits, 1987; Geeraert & Newman, submitted). I explore the use of these two levelling patterns through a production and a comprehension experiment. Both experiments contain 120 irregular verbs tested in five conditions: the past tense, the past participle, and the past participle with a modal, a reduced form of have, and negation. These conditions were split evenly among the verbs and presented to the participants in random order. The production experiment is a cloze task, adapted from Bybee and Slobin’s (1982) study, and is designed to elicit participants’ spoken spontaneous productions. In order to ensure the responses produced by the participants are spontaneous, the participants have been placed under pressure for time. The comprehension experiment is an eye-tracking study, where the participants’ eye-movements are recorded as they read the sentences on the computer screen. For this experiment, half of the sentences contain the standard verb form (e.g. Mary ate breakfast or I have driven you there), while the second half contain the non-standard variant (e.g. Mary eaten breakfast or I have drove you there). This workshop will involve a discussion of the preliminary results of these two experiments.

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**The Body and the Construction of Units in Interaction**
Xiaoting Li (University of Alberta)
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The notion of units in conversation has typically been the genesis of inquiry among conversation analysts and linguists. Setting out from the question of how units are produced and interpreted in conversational interaction, this study explores the organizational pattern of body movements and its significance in the construction and delimitation of units in Mandarin face-to-face interaction.

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**The LOCATIVE ALTERNATION:**
The Semantics and Pragmatics of a so-called Syntactic Phenomenon
Dagmara Dowbor (University of Alberta)
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The present paper presents an investigation into a phenomenon in language that has been known as the **LOCATIVE ALTERNATION** (also known as the *spray/load* alternation (Levin 1993)), which refers to a dichotomous set of syntactic structures, such as *we loaded hay onto the truck* and *we loaded the truck with hay*, whereby one is understood as the basic pattern and the other as its derived variant.

The present study provides a deeper insight into this phenomenon by means of a corpus-linguistic investigation and offers a more extended and refined account which argues that (1) the phenomenon is not primarily a syntactic but rather conceptual phenomenon, and the resulting syntactic structures are purely epiphenomenal; (2) the motivation of the alternating property of the participating verbs is metonymic in nature (*ACTION FOR RESULT* metonymy), whereby the source expression denoting a causing event (*PUT*) is used to express the target result event (*FILL*) – a conceptual blend also characterized as *source meaning elaboration* (Panther 2005: 358); (3) the two variants are seen as cases of different profiling (Langacker 1987), whereby one of the two main arguments (*THEME* or *LOCATION*) is singled out as the affected entity in focus; (4) the phenomenon is not dichotomous, but polytomous, i.e. not two, but a multitude of different conceptual and syntactic structures result from the conceptual phenomenon driving the alternation; furthermore, (5) a number of semantic and pragmatic explanations are proposed for
cases that allow for the omission of one or even both THEME and LOCATION arguments: entailment (brush your teeth), coercion by context (brushing after every meal), restricted interpretative options (load the gun, plant a tree), high levels of conventionalization (pack, cram) – all of which facilitate pragmatic inferencing and thus allow for linguistic economy.

References


**Tendencies of Semantic Change in Dene body-part, effluvia and ephemera terms**

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As a conceptual domain, the human body encompasses not only those parts whose removal would constitute great loss to the organism, but also those that are dispensed with regularly, such as bodily excretions, or periodically, like fingernails. These differences in permanence also have linguistic ramifications. In this study, body-part terms (such as ‘head’, ‘arm’) are compared to terms from two closely related semantic domains: those of effluvia (e.g. ‘blood’, ‘urine’) and ephemera (e.g. ‘fingernails’, ‘warts’). While these three domains are related through their conceptual locus in the human body, the manner of their lexicalization contrasts in linguistically interesting ways. I compare terms from all three domains on the basis of data from Athapaskan, a large but understudied family of languages spoken in western North America.

Inspired by Wilkins’ (1996) seminal work, the study adds to a growing comparative literature on language change within this semantic domain. Expanding on Wilkins’ work, terms denoting bodily products and less permanent bodily elements were added to the data for analysis. The BEET (Body-part, Ephemera and Effluvia Terms) database covering 29 Athapaskan languages and dialects was constructed for this purpose. An onomasiological grid of 131 English language terms formed the basis of the data gathering technique. Published sources, chiefly dictionaries, but raw field notes as well, provided the main sources of the data. In this workshop I will be discussing instances of semantic change in a selection of items from the database and interpreting these in the light of recent developments in cognitive semantics.

References

Unsupervised Learning of Syntactic Similarities between Words
Simong Fung (University of Alberta)
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Automatic syntactic analysis of text using unlabeled corpora can be useful in the study and processing of the many languages of the world with few linguistic resources. In this presentation, I will describe an algorithm for measuring syntactic similarities between pairs of words in an unlabeled corpus. It is similar to the task of unsupervised part-of-speech learning, except this algorithm gives a measure of similarity in the words' syntactic contexts, instead of categorizing words into discrete syntactic categories. This shows differences between words that belong to the same conventional parts of speech. Although currently the algorithm can only train on a very small corpus in a reasonable amount of time, preliminary results are encouraging.