HEADSHAKES IN JESPERSEN'S CYCLE

Роланд Пфау (Университет Амстердама)

Sign languages (SLs), systematically make use of two types of negative markers: manual signs and non-manual markers (most importantly, a headshake). However, unlike spoken languages which employ two negators (e.g. French), both negative expressions are grammaticalized gestures and can combine simultaneously. In addition, it has been shown that the way in which these markers combine is subject to SL-specific constraints.

In this presentation, we offer some speculations about the emergence and change of negation systems in SLs. We argue that the genesis of negation in SLs follows Jespersen's Cycle (JC, Jespersen 1917) according to which "[t]he original negative adverb is first weakened, then found insufficient and therefore strengthened, generally through some additional word, and this in turn may be felt as the negative proper and […] be subject to the same development as the original word."

We suggest the following scenario: Given that manual gestures commonly lexicalize in SLs (Wilcox 2007), we assume that first, a manual negative gesture is lexicalized as a negative adverbial (NEGadv); as such, it adjoins to VP. Second, once this adverbial is accompanied sufficiently frequently by the gestural headshake, the headshake is reanalyzed as a lexical non-manual component of NEGadv. At this point, we reach a manual dominant negation system, i.e. a system in which (i) NEGadv is obligatory and (ii) the non-manual only accompanies NEGadv (Zeshan 2004). Third, NEGadv is reanalyzed as a negative particle NEG that is merged in SpecNegP. Having entered the functional domain, the non-manual may dissociate from NEG and turn into a negative affix merged in Neg° (Pfau & Quer 2007; Pfau 2016). In a final step, NEG becomes optional, yielding a non-manual dominant negation system, and may eventually disappear.

This scenario predicts that in SLs, JC starts with a lexicalized manual gesture. Only in a second step, the non-manual gesture enters the grammatical system. Since SLs prefer simultaneous morphology and only rarely develop manual affixes (Aronoff et al. 2005), it is the non-manual that survives JC while NEG becomes optional. Hence, SLs follow JC in a modality-specific way.

UNCOMMON OR RARE? A TYPOLOGICAL STUDY OF LEXICAL VS. MORPHOLOGICALLY NEGATED ANTONYMS

Maria Koptjevskaja Tamm (Stockholm University), Matti Miestamo (University of Helsinki) & Carl Börstell (Stockholm University)

Antonymy is a semantic relation well-known in linguistic literature (see e.g. Horn 1989). It may be realized by different lexical items (good vs. bad) or by items that are related to each other derivationally, e.g. by morphological negation (happy vs. un-happy). The two types – lexical and morphological antonyms – may, however, co-occur within the same "antonym set". For such overlapping cases, the different types may be associated with different semantics and/or

connotations (e.g. unwise vs. stupid as the antonym of wise). To date, cross-linguistic studies on derivational negation have been limited in scope (cf. Zimmer 1964); our current study is the first systematic typological survey on lexical vs. derived antonymy.

We have designed a questionnaire containing 41 antonym pairs representative of different types of property concepts, e.g. the different adjective classes identified in (Dixon & Aikhenvald 2004): core (e.g. DIMENSION, AGE); peripheral (e.g. PHYSICAL PROPERTY, SPEED); and other (e.g. DIFFICULTY, SIMILARITY). Experts of languages from different families and geographical areas have filled in the questionnaire, providing the corresponding property words and examples in their respective language of expertise. Currently, our database contains information on 46 languages from different families and geographical areas.

A variety of research questions can be addressed on the basis of these data. In this talk, we focus on the distribution of lexical vs. derivational expression of antonymy:

a) Which types of property words are typically targeted by derivational vs. lexical antonymy, and why?

b) How prominent is derivational vs. lexical expression of antonymy across the individual languages in our sample?

Our preliminary results show that there is a great deal of variation as to which property words are targeted by derivational antonym-formation through morphological negation (i.e. happyà un-happy) and which ones are expressed lexically. The 41 antonym pairs can be ranked by the proportion of languages that make use of a morphologically negated (i.e. derived) form for each pair. Three meanings (‘important, ‘possible’, and ‘happy’) exhibit morphological negation in the majority of the sample languages. Two pairs – ‘black vs. white’ and ‘right vs. left’ – do not have morphologically negated forms in any language in our sample. One generalization we can already make is that concrete physical properties favour lexical expression whereas derivational antonymy is more common with abstract (epistemo)logical relations. We also observe that our sampled languages differ as to how prominent derivational vs. lexical expression of antonymy is in the language. While Lithuanian and Russian are able to use morphological negation for the majority of the meanings in the list, other languages (Amharic, Indonesian, and Yucatec Maya) do not make use of this strategy at all. Note that the figures for derivational expression and lexical expression are not a simple mirror image of each other, since both types are sometimes found in the expression of one and the same antonym pair in a given language.

In our research we will examine a wide variety of factors that can influence the distribution of derivational vs. lexical antonymy across types of property concepts on the one hand and across languages on the other.

References

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