

Identifying form-function correlations via coexpression patterns

demotion, coexpression patterns, morphosyntax, form-based and function-based approach

Aim. The correlation between functions and forms is not always consistently mapped one-to-one. In our research, we explore this question for similar grammatical constructions that are functionally equivalent, hence crosslinguistically comparable, despite potential variations in their formal characteristics. We focused on four construction types [i) antipassives, ii) noun incorporation, iii) pseudo incorporation, iv) indefinite P (object) omission] that are similar in that they result from the voice or valency alternation where P is demoted, i.e., it loses the properties of a core argument, without affecting the verb argument structure. For instance, sentences (1a-1c) are functionally comparable, expressing the same event, though formally different. (1a) is transitive with the patient *tuttu* coded like the P argument. (1b-1c) alternate with (1a). (1b) is an antipassive with P coded like an oblique, and (1c) is P incorporation.

1. West Greenlandic (Eskimo-Aleut; Fortescue 1984: 86)

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| a. | <i>tuttu</i> | <i>taku-aa</i> |
| | caribou.ABS | see-3SG.3SG.IND |
| | ‘He saw the caribou.’ | |
| b. | <i>tuttu-mik</i> | <i>taku-vuq</i> |
| | caribou-INS | see-3SG.IND |
| | ‘He saw a caribou.’ | |
| c. | <i>tuttu-si-vuq</i> | |
| | caribou-come.across-3SG.IND | |
| | ‘He saw (a) caribou.’ | |

Approach, data, method, research question. We conducted our typological study based on a small sample of 15 languages from six macroareas. We collected data through a questionnaire and analyzed it in multivariate typology (Bickel 2011). Thus, each construction type was decomposed into crosslinguistically comparable formal and functional variables. Specifically, we coded the strategies used by languages to demote P that concerned various P realizations (oblique, bare argument, incorporation, omission), further accompanied by a change in P coding properties like flagging, indexation (Comrie et al. 2015). For each P-demoting strategy type (Croft 2016, 2022), we subsequently asked the question about coexpression patterns: “What kinds of (other) functions or meanings can a given P-demoting strategy have in languages?” – thus moving from a form to a function-based approach (Haspelmath 2023). The functional properties of a demoted P: animacy, affectedness, and referentiality were in focus.

Results. The analysis showed that animacy plays little role in P demotion, whereas affectedness tends to be relevant to P-oblique. The non-referential, generic meaning of P tends to correlate with an incorporated P and a suppressed P of antipassives. The non-referential, indefinite P tends to correlate with P-omission and P-suppression of antipassives. We will capture these form-function correlations through a coexpression diagram – a specifically designed for this purpose graphic representation of the coexpression relationship (Haspelmath 2023).

References

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