

## Conference report

CIPL Travel Grant for attending the 21st International Congress of Linguists

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I traveled to Poznań, Poland, to attend the 21st International Congress of Linguists (ICL). I am honored to have been selected as a recipient of a travel grant from Comité International Permanent des Linguistes / Permanent International Committee of Linguists (CIPL).

### My presentation

The research project about which I presented at ICL is a main topic of my dissertation, which is currently in progress. In my dissertation, I investigate how to describe synchronically gradient phenomena in morphosyntax, focusing on grammatical description of the Hurukui language of Papua New Guinea. I combine a sketch grammar with a deep dive into the nature of the gradient found in the language's light verb constructions (LVCs).

I presented in the workshop "Usage-based approaches to syntax and semantics", convened by Dr. Stephen Wechsler from the University of Texas at Austin. My presentation was titled "Gradient univerbation in light verb constructions in Hurukui". The first goal of my talk was to describe the Hurukui LVC system in detail. The second was to use quantitative analysis to investigate the gradient of univerbation and explain it in a usage-based framework. For instance, some of the LVCs seldom have intervening modifiers, increasing the frequency of vowel deletion and fusion over time. Some of them require co-occurrence and phonological fusion of the two elements *even if* modifiers intervene, creating something like incipient adjective incorporation. I defined a multidimensional space of Hurukui LVCs, considering variables such as the number, position, and intensity of stressed syllables; frequency of vowel elision; collocation frequency; flexibility of which initials can occur with which LVs; morphology on the element accompanying the light verb; and degree of semantic compositionality. I showed how different LVC lexemes fit into this space and along a cline from canonically two-word LVCs to canonically one-word verb stems.

## **What I learned from feedback on my talk**

My presentation was well received despite the still-in-progress nature of the study. Commenters noted that it was a very interesting phenomenon and based on novel field data (much of it collected this same summer, not long before the conference), and they are excited to see what becomes of the project.

One commenter asked if there is a preferred order of property changes as an LVC moves from the prototypically two-word region to the prototypically one-word region of the space. What correlations are there among the properties synchronically? What can these correlations tell us about likely stages along the univerbation pathway(s)?

One commenter asked how semantic groups of LVCs correlate with the properties or regions of the space. This is another direction that I have been wanting to look into but have not yet.

One commenter gave me good context regarding which authors have argued that LV roots can be eroded or become part of the verb stem, and who has argued for or against the cline from LV to auxiliary verb. This comment has given me good directions for further reading about the steps taken as light verbs grammaticalize into other kinds of things.

This was all very good food for thought, and I will incorporate this feedback into my research on this project. I am particularly interested in the ways in which quantitative methods can be used to shed light on linguistic questions such as the dynamics of morphosyntactic change, and this will be a major focus of my dissertation.

## **What I learned from other talks**

The usage-based workshop that I was part of contained lots of valuable resources for my learning and which will factor into my analysis of Hurukui. For instance, reinforcement learning algorithms mimic the ways in which humans learn language as a behavior, and it is linguists, not speakers, who do reanalysis of morphosyntactic structures, while speakers simply re-contextualize utterances based on new situations in which they are used.

I attended a talk about "hidden compounds", in which speakers are no longer aware that an element is (or recently was) composed of two morphemes. This mirrors the opacity of some of the Hurukui LVCs to speakers. I took notes about the patterns of usage and co-occurrence with other constituents that led to some of these compounds being so fused, and it gave me some good ideas of things to look at in my Hurukui corpus.

I will read more of the literature that people mentioned regarding similar phenomena to those that I am studying in my project. I have also been working on a paper about the evolution of a new auxiliary verb construction in Hurukui, unrelated to

the LVCs, but still relevant to the diachrony of univerbation in a type of complex predicate. I attended a talk about the grammaticalization of perfects with auxiliary "be" in Balto-Slavic, which is relevant for my account of the Hurukui perfect and remote past which use auxiliary "stay/exist".

I also attended some talks not related to my current research projects, but related to passion projects that I hope to turn into research projects someday. A major one of these is simulation of language change, especially sound change. For years I have been playing in free time with creating a domain-specific programming language for implementing sound changes and morphological changes. I attended a talk about computerized forward reconstruction, which has been used for work on the history of the Romance languages, and I learned the names of a lot of other linguists and their programs that do things similar to the one I have built. I would love to do serious research work in this field, together with data about Papuan languages collected by me and my advisor, to advance knowledge about the history of Trans-New Guinea.

### **People I met**

Attending ICL also gave me lots of opportunities to network and meet linguists whose work I want to look into more as I conduct my research project. I met some other researchers who are working on gradient notions of synchronic wordhood which arise from the diachrony of univerbation, so I will be sure to read their work. I also got to talk to some linguists who referred me to literature about light verb constructions and other kinds of complex predicates that are known from Papuan languages and elsewhere.

Aside from the professional development, knowledge gained, and networking opportunities, I had a good time! I ate lots of delicious Polish food, had learned some basic Polish and got to practice it, heard some good music, and got to see the beauty of the town of Poznań. I am very appreciative to have been given this opportunity!