

From metaphorical usage to configurational grammar

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A central aspect which distinguishes non-configurational and configurational grammars is that the latter possess function words which take obligatory dependents in specific syntagmatic slots (Himmelmann 1997). Such syntactic constraints on overt expression and syntactic position are defining characteristics of configurationality, which are, however, famously lacking in non-configurational languages. Building on Reinöhl (2016: 148-158), we propose that the metaphorical usage of content words plays a key role in their grammaticalization into function words that require obligatory dependents, and thus in the development from non-configurational to configurational structure.

Indo-Aryan develops from non-configurationality in Old Indo-Aryan to configurationality in New Indo-Aryan through the development of postpositional phrases. The modern postpositions grammaticalized from various parts of speech including spatial nouns. Whereas spatial nouns, such as *madhye* ‘in the middle’ (middle.LOC.SG.N), could occur on their own in Old Indic without dependents, its grammaticalized reflex, Hindi *mē* ‘in’, requires a dependent, e.g. *ghar mē* ‘in a/the house’. Reinöhl (2016) argues that metaphorical usages of *madhye* in older stages of Indo-Aryan are crucial stepping stones to the obligatorification of the dependent possessor. For instance, whereas ‘in the middle (of a lake)’ is felicitous without possessor if the referent is activated, usages such as ‘in the middle (of my heart, I feel ...)’ require the possessor (i.e. ‘of my heart’) to be interpretable in all cases – and are in fact not attested without it. In such cases, the referent is not retrievable without overt specification. The increase in metaphorical usages over time paves the way for the obligatorification of dependents, and thus to configurationality.

We adduce additional synchronic evidence that shows obligatory expression of dependents in English and German. In addition, building on existing work (e.g. Glucksberg 2003), we present a model of priming in metaphorical interpretation that accounts for the obligatory specification of targets.

References

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