

The Economy of Reanalysis: Syntactic Change as a Last Resort Operation

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Basic assumptions about syntactic change

This study relies on the idea that syntactic change stems from certain problems that learners can have while they are fixing a grammar during the language acquisition period, i.e. that change stems from the discontinuity of transmission of a language between generations [6, 8]. The model adopted here views reanalysis as a new way of parsing the PLD (Primary Linguistic Data) by learners who, as a result, acquire a grammar different than the one that produced those PLD. Acquisition is assumed not to be error-driven, but to proceed according to a cue-based model [4, 6]. Changes in I-grammars are therefore triggered outside the core domain of syntax, basically, by E-language factors, which can change the external shape of the PLD and, thus, give rise to new cues in them [6].

The main hypothesis

Reanalysis is not free; it applies according to certain economy restrictions. Economy requirements affect syntactic change in two ways: (A) change is a resort only available when a learner needs to repair parsing conflicts that can arise in problematic PLD during the acquisition period; (B) change takes place only when strictly necessary, i.e. when all the cues that are needed to acquire a certain item / structure have previously disappeared.

The analysis

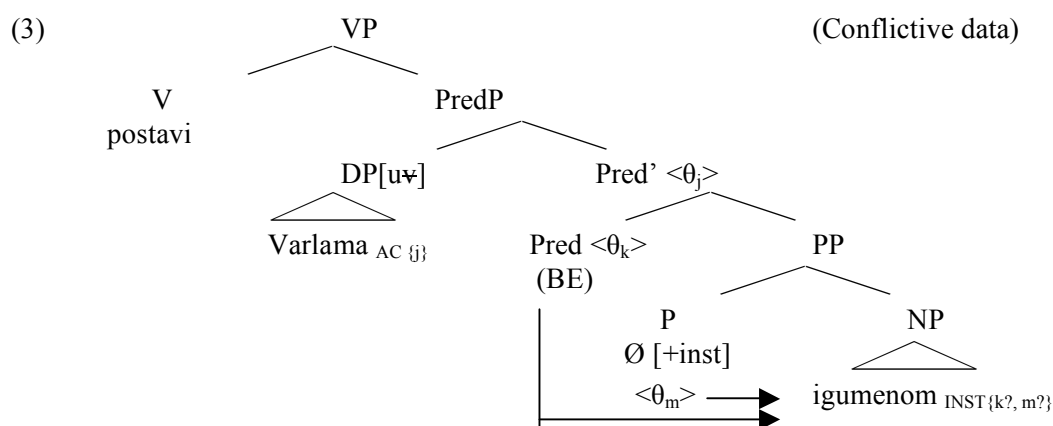
These restrictions on change will be illustrated with the help of an example from the history of Russian: the reanalysis of the instrumental case as the case of non-verbal predication. I will claim that the former instrumental circumstantial phrases of manner and comparison, analysed as a PPs with a null P head [5], and illustrated in (1), were the basis for the reanalysis [3, 7]. Predication, on the other hand, is assumed to be instantiated via a special Pred head [1].

The instrumental PPs of comparison and manner started to be selected by Pred heads in predicative contexts in Old Church Slavonic and Old Russian, giving rise to examples like (2), whose structure is represented in (3) below. The PLD changed externally and the learner had to face a parsing conflict, namely, the predicate NP seemed to be receiving a double theta-role: one from the P, another one from the Pred head -assuming that all nouns, even predicates, receive a theta-role [2]. The conflict is solved by reanalysing the structure as represented in (4), the structure that Russian predicates nowadays display [1].

The economy of this change is shown via two types of evidence: (i) syntactic contexts where this reanalysis spread much later than in NP predicates (future tensed sentences and AP predicates); (ii) syntactic contexts where this reanalysis did not take place at all: sentences with copular verb elision; nationality nouns, proper names and complex NPs as primary predicates; sentences with imperfective verbs of motion and stance verbs; predicates introduced by an overt predicator; and predicates related to oblique antecedents. The Economy of change in the former contexts will be explained via the principle (B) formulated above: reanalysis did not take place in them until it became necessary. The latter contexts will be accounted for with the help of (A): reanalysis did not take place at all because there was no parsing conflict in them.

Examples and structures

- (1) Игорь *sokolomъ* poletě. (The Lay of Igor's Campaign, 443)
 Igor falcon_{INST} flew
 'Igor flew away as a falcon.'
- (2) I postavi imъ *igumenomъ* Varlama. (Laurentian Chronicle, 53b)
 and put them abbot_{INST} Varlam_{AC}
 'And he designated Varlam as their abbot.'



- (4) [_{VP} Postavi [_{PredP} [_{DP} Varlama] Pred <θ_k> [_{NP} [_{uPred}] igumenom_{INST} {k}]]]

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