Theoretical Approaches to Grammatical (Non-)Identity in Synchrony and Diachrony

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Workshop description

The issue of whether two grammatical or lexical items that shallowly resemble one another in terms of their externalisation are identical or distinct with respect to the grammatical properties associated with them is often one that cannot be settled in any straightforward manner. From a diachronic perspective, it is typically far from clear whether a lexical item undergoing grammaticalisation (i) forces the formation of a dedicated entry in the lexicon that retains only some of the properties associated with its source, or (ii) just develops the ability to (optionally) be base-generated higher in a given functional domain (see Roberts & Roussou 2003).

These considerations, of course, bear direct consequences for the synchronic properties of the items in question: does HAVE, for instance, give rise to two dedicated entries (main verb ‚I have a car‘ vs. auxiliary ‚I have bought a car‘) in line with (i) or is there just one item that may be inserted in different syntactic positions thus taking distinct (nominal vs. verbal) complements as suggested by (ii) (see Cowper 1989, Ackema & Marelj 2012)? Particularly pressing with respect to grammatical (non-)identity are cases which potentially qualify for a large degree of under-specification and allow for an explanation of both (or several) grammatical variants on the basis of a single set of features.

Apart from the aforementioned case of HAVE (and similar questions arising for other auxiliaries), some further examples of relevant empirical domains are the following: the identity of embedded clauses and free relatives introduced by ‚what‘ (see Cecchetto & Donati 2015), the non-identity of central and peripheral adverbial clauses e.g. introduced by ‚while‘ (see Haegeman 2012; Endo & Haegeman 2019), the identity of passive and perfect(ive) participles (see Wegner 2019), and the case of ‚for‘ as a preposition and a complementiser (see Jarad 1997, Fischer et al. 2000). In addition to the empirical question of whether the configurations are (non-)identical, the issue arises of how to delineate the two poles. One way to do so is Haegeman's (2003) distinc-tion of internal and external syntax: whenever there are distinctions in internal syntax, the con-figurations in question are non-identical, yet if the distinctions may be reduced to the ‚external‘ functional surrounding, identity ensues.

This workshop aims at theoretically spelling out approaches to the synchronic as well as diachronic (non-)identity of homophonous grammatical or lexical items. These promise to grant important insights into the characteristics of central concepts like reanalysis, bleaching and underspecification, but potentially also bear theoretical consequences for the bigger picture, e.g. with respect to the delineation of lexicalist as opposed to antilexicalist approaches.

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