Project A01:   Creativity in (morpho)syntactic variation: The role of analogy

Project leaders: András Bárány, Jutta M. Hartmann

Project Summary

Productivity is a well-researched creative process in (morpho)syntax, but it does not account for all possible new forms, structures and/or dependencies in languages. There are expressions that do not conform to established rules but are nevertheless used to express specific meanings. This project aims to identify creative processes of this kind in (morpho)syntax which go beyond productivity, to explore their potential and the limits of their application both within and across individual languages.

Our working hypothesis is that, in contrast to abstract rules underlying general productivity, analogy can act on superficial or structural similarities between expressions, interacting with formal proper-ties of these expressions, such as argument structure and hierarchical relations, to varying degrees. In order to investigate this hypothesis we consider a range of phenomena in which we find structures involving different kinds of dependencies, and we explore whether parallels in surface (e.g. word order) and syntactic structure influence their acceptability, possibly through analogical processes. In each case, we hypothesise that an existing structure in which a particular morphosyntactic process occurs is similar enough to a target structure such that the morphosyntactic process is analogically extended to the target structure, even if the target structure does not usually support said process.

First, we study long-distance object agreement in Hungarian, where, for a subset of speakers, object agreement between the matrix verb and the accusative object of an embedded infinitival clause is possible with intransitive verbs (the target structure). This is unexpected, as object agreement in Hungarian is otherwise restricted to transitive verbs. Second, we look at prepositional object clauses, where in some cases the P-element can be dropped, giving rise to structures that look like direct ob-ject clauses. Finally, we find acceptable long-distance move-ment dependencies into islands, which have been reported to exist in various languages, including German. Here, too, we suspect that exist-ing grammatical structures supporting long-distance dependencies are similar enough to island con-structions that the latter do allow long-distance dependencies in particular contexts.

Investigating this range of phenomena will allow us to work towards investigating analogy as a gen-eral principle involved in creating new forms beyond general rule application. More specifically, our project aims at answering the following research questions:

Q1 To what extent and how can (morpho)syntactic processes such as selection, (long-distance) agreement and (long-distance) dislocation be extended from existing structures to similar target structures?

Q2 To what extent and how is such extension sensitive to different levels of structure, e.g. surface orders and underlying, hierarchical structures?

Q3 Where are the limits of analogical extension in (morpho)syntax both within and across languages?

Open Positions

PhD position 1 (65%)
Profile: The ideal candidate has a master in linguistics or a related field with a focus on (morpho-)syntax, ideally with a background in Hungarian.
Main research focus within the project: Focus of the PhD thesis will be in the domain of adjunct clauses and complement clauses in Hungarian, with a focus on long distance agreement.

PhD position 2 (65%)
Profile: The ideal candidate has a master in linguistics or a related field, ideally with a background in Germanic languages.
Main research focus within the project: The dissertation topic will be in the domain of clausal embeddings and long-distance dependencies with a cross-linguistic comparison.

For further information please contact the project leaders:

Dr. András Bárány (andras.barany@uni-bielefeld.de), Prof. Dr. Jutta M. Hartmann (jutta-maria.hartmann@uni-bielefeld.de)