Lexical Semantics and Argument Realization

Syllabus

Instructor: Beth Levin
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Dates, time, and place: Monday, Wednesday, Friday, 8:30-10:30am

Course Description: Attempts to characterize the event structure-to-syntax mapping often include argument realization generalizations which treat each argument of a verb individually (e.g., an agent is a subject). The course will show that such generalizations are inadequate, for the syntactic expression of one argument may depend on its coarguments (e.g., an instrument cannot be a subject in the presence of an agent), and it will investigate the implications of such interrelations among coarguments for the design of theories of lexical semantic representation and argument realization. The phenomena suggest the need for semantic prominence relations among arguments, which then have implications for the architecture of event structure and the nature of the event structure-to-syntax mapping. The viability of various theories of the semantic determinants of argument realization will be reassessed in this context. The course will also explore instances of systematic crosslinguistic variation in argument realization, and show that they arise from interactions between the event structure-to-syntax mapping and language-specific argument realization options. Case studies will include the (in)transitivity of two-argument verbs and dative verbs and the dative alternation. The course assumes some familiarity with lexical semantics and syntax.

Course Requirements: Completion of TWO questions chosen from a list to be handed out towards the middle of the class. Solutions must be e-mailed to the instructor no later than WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2006; only PDF files will be accepted; no .doc or .rtf files.

Lecture Outline (Tentative)

Lecture 1: Empirical and conceptual challenges of argument realization
READING: Fillmore 1970; Levin & Rappaport Hovav (L&RH) 2005, Chapter 1

Lecture 2: Structuring event structure
READING: Grimshaw 2005; Levin 1999; L&RH 2005, Sections 3.2, 4.2.5; RH&L 1998

Lecture 3: Exploring crucial components of verb meaning: Manner, result and aspect
READING: L&RH 2005, Section 4.2.4; RH&L 2002

Lecture 4: Approaches to preserving meaning in the lexical semantics-syntax mapping
  A case study: The thematic hierarchy
READING: Dik; L&RH 2005, Chapters 5 and 6

Lectures 5 and 6: Further semantic determinants of argument realization
READING: Blume 1998; Dowty 1991, Sects 4–9; L&RH 2005, Chapter 4; Tsunoda 1985

Lectures 7 and 8: The dative alternation and argument realization:
  A case study in the ranking of themes, goals, and recipients
  A case study in surface diversity and underlying agreement among languages
READING: Harley 2003; RH&L 2005
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Course Readings

NOTE: An asterisk indicates that the reading is downloadable from http://www-csli.stanford.edu/~beth/pubs.html; other readings are available for copying.


