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English Historical Syntax and Morphology

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Introduction

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The Eleventh International Conference on English Historical Linguistics (11 ICEHL) was held at the University of Santiago de Compostela between 7th and 11th September 2000. The number of participants exceeded 250, while the papers delivered within the conference's main programme came to 120. The distinguished panel of plenary speakers featured Douglas Biber, Laurel J. Brinton, Santiago González Fernández-Corugedo, Raymond Hickey, Chris McCully, Frans Plank, Irma Taavitsainen, Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade and Anthony Warner. There were also several events running concurrently with the main programme, notably a workshop on historical word-formation, a para-session on electronic corpora and a poster session.

This volume is a companion to another one also containing papers from the same conference: *Sounds, Words, Texts and Change. Selected Papers from 11 ICEHL, Santiago de Compostela, 7–11 September 2000*, edited by Teresa Fanego, Belén Méndez-Naya & Elena Seoane (CILT 224). The two volumes together offer a representative sample of the contributions presented at the conference, including some of those delivered during the workshop on historical word-formation. The papers that have survived the successive selection procedures for presentation and publication¹ quite accurately reflect the various concerns of English historical linguistics at the turn of the millennium and the different methodologies applied to address them.

Though grouped together under the convenient heading of 'Syntax and Morphology', the articles contained herein testify to the often noted fact (see e.g. van Kemenade 1999: 1002) that some of the current approaches to linguistic research — most notably grammaticalization theory — are increasingly calling into question a number of the basic axioms of structural linguistics, such as the notion of the discreteness of categories or the autonomy of the domains of grammar. In several of the contributions morphology, syntax,

semantics and communicative strategies of various kinds are seen as impinging on one another (see e.g. the papers by Allen, Biber & Clark, Kornexl, Krug, Lenker, Los, or Möhlig & Klages). Largely for this reason, we have made no attempt to organize the papers thematically and have simply presented them in alphabetical order. However, so as to give the reader some preliminary idea of what this volume has to offer, we will give a brief summary of the main issues in each individual paper.

Grammaticalization processes are discussed in the papers by Akimoto, Brinton and Krug. Akimoto ("Two Types of Passivization of 'V+NP+P' Constructions in relation to Idiomatization") examines the passivization of composite predicates like *make allowance for* or *put an end to* on the basis of extensive data from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries and relates the type of passivization allowed by each predicate to its degree of idiomatization (Akimoto 1995). He shows that deverbal nouns with overt suffixes, such as *allowance*, are less easily fused with their verbs than deverbal nouns without suffixes, such as *end*, which accounts for their different behaviour regarding facts of passivization: inner passives ("allowance ought to be made for the Society") are preferred by the former class of nouns; outer passives ("the pause was put an end to"), by contrast, are more characteristic of nouns without suffixes. Brinton's article ("Grammaticalization versus Lexicalization Reconsidered: On the late Use of Temporal Adverbs") discusses a problem in the history of English which seems to present a challenge for concepts such as grammaticalization and lexicalization: the use of temporal adverbs as attributive adjectives, as in *the often remembrance*. Such usage was common in Early Modern English, but for most of the forms it was transient, and they are found only adverbially in Modern English. Brinton looks at possible ways of explaining this categorial shift and, although she tends to view the change as a case of grammaticalization, notes that doing so is not unproblematic: the forms discussed do not exhibit a downgrading of categorial status (i.e. from more major to more minor category) and hence do not meet the principle of decategorialization (Hopper 1991) which is usually considered central to grammaticalization processes. Finally, in "A Path to Volitional Modality" Krug traces the syntactic and semantic changes undergone by the verb *want* from its early use as a transitive verb meaning 'lack' ("the fool wants wit"), and later 'need' ("this room wants cleaning") and 'desire' ("I want an apple"), to its use as a catenative encoding modal meanings like volition ("I want to go to the cinema") or, more recently, obligation ("you want to be careful"). He argues that this semantic development was motivated by the gradual conventionalization of pragmatic inferences (Hopper & Traugott

1993:63ff.) in appropriate syntactic contexts: what is lacked by somebody will often be needed, and hence desired — from which it is only a small step to the volitional reading where what is desired is no longer a concrete nominal object but an action or a state of affairs. Semantically, *want* has therefore become increasingly abstract and more grammatical. Syntactically, the *want* + *to*-infinitive construction, which involves the concatenation of two verb phrases, is also more grammaticalized than the original transitive verb governing a NP object.

Noun phrase structure is the topic of two papers. In "On the Development of a friend of mine" Allen discusses the development of the double genitive construction. She traces the first examples of expressions like "a friend of mine" to the middle of the fourteenth century, and argues that the precursor of the double genitive can be found in Early Middle English constructions without a nominal head like *zif þu mare spenest of þine* 'if you spend more of yours' (i.e. 'of your money'); these constructions, which involve partitive *of* and the absolute use of a possessive pronoun, make reference to 'part of a set'. From this the meaning shifted to the 'membership in a set' meaning that characterizes the noun-headed double genitive. In turn Biber & Clark ("Historical Shifts in Modification Patterns with Complex Noun Phrase Structures: How Long Can You Go without a Verb?") examine patterns of noun modification in English from 1650 to the present. They show that over the past 100 years (especially the past 50 years in the case of noun–noun sequences) a major historical shift has taken place to favour the use of nouns as premodifiers (which are now nearly as important as attributive adjectives) and of prepositional phrases (rather than relative clauses) as postmodifiers. One major consequence of this historical shift is the development of a much more compressed, less explicit style of presentation which, Biber & Clark suggest, may have been facilitated by functional factors like recent advances in the technology of literacy, coupled with the 'informational explosion' resulting in pressure to communicate information as economically as possible.

The paper by Los ("The Loss of the Indefinite Pronoun *man*: Syntactic Change and Information Structure") analyses how the indefinite pronoun *man* 'one' fell into disuse in Late Middle English and relates this to the loss of V2 and to the spread of *to*-infinitival complementation. The loss of V2 affected the information structure of English main clauses: with the generalization of SV, subject NPs — unless preceded by another clause constituent fronted for special discourse effects (e.g. "*tennis* I like") — came to function as unmarked themes (cf. Halliday 1994) encoding given information and maintaining textual cohesion. This left little scope for the indefinite *man*, whose main role had been to

provide a contentless subject, and promoted the use of impersonal (i.e. agentless) passives, which increasingly took over the function of *man* in main clauses. In the transition from Old English to Middle English there was also a decline of *man* in dependent clauses as a result of competition between subjunctive *that*-clauses and *to*-infinitives after certain verbs, which led to *man* in such clauses being largely ousted by generic PRO (e.g. *ic æfre behead* [PRO_{gen}] *þone drihtelican dæg to healdenne* 'I have ever ordered to keep the Lord's day').

Schlüter's paper ("Morphology Recycled: The Principle of Rhythmic Alternation at Work in Early and Late Modern English Grammatical Variation") is concerned with the so-called Principle of Rhythmic Alternation (cf. Selkirk 1984: 37: "[t]here is arguably a universal rhythmic ideal, one that favors a strict alternation of strong and weak beats"), whose effects she illustrates with reference to a number of grammatical variation phenomena taking place chiefly in the Early and Late Modern English periods, such as the distribution of mono- and disyllabic past participle variants (*drunk/drunken*), or the variable marking of infinitives dependent on the verb *make* in the passive (e.g. *made to glisten / made draw water*). All her analyses are concerned with intermediate phases of language change in which morphemes and markers are no longer or not yet quite obligatory in terms of grammatical motivations. Schlüter shows that it is precisely in these phases of indeterminacy that the Principle of Rhythmic Alternation may assume the role of an influential determinant.

An area of research pursued with great interest at the 11th ICEHL was word-formation processes. Three of the papers in this line — by Kornexl, Lenker and Kastovsky — appear in this volume. Kornexl ("From *gold-gifa* to *chimney sweep*? Morphological (Un)markedness of Modern English Agent Nouns in a Diachronic Perspective") examines nominal formations and challenges assumptions about the diachronic continuity from Old English times of agentive zero-derivation: according to such assumptions, nouns like *cheat*, *cook* or *chimney sweep* would be the Modern English analogues of Old English zero derivatives like *bora* 'bearer' or *gold-gifa* 'gold-giver'. Kornexl argues, however, that English has never developed a productive type of zero-derived agentives; alleged zero-derived agentive nouns are either loans (*cook*, *guide*, *judge*) or members of a special category of formally unmarked 'attitudinal' nouns (*cheat*, *bore*, *tramp*) reflecting the speaker's attitude towards certain people or things and thus crucially differing, both semantically and pragmatically, from prototypical agentives. Lenker's paper ("Is It, Stylewise or Otherwise, Wise to Use *-wise*? Domain Adverbials and the History of English *-wise*") discusses the recent emergence of viewpoint adverbials in *-wise* (e.g. "there are

two types of hydrogen atoms *positionwise*'). After an examination of the distribution and productivity of sentence adverbial *-wise* in Present-day English, she connects its emergence to the history of viewpoint adverbials in German and English. Viewpoint adverbials are a new category of sentence adverb not attested until the nineteenth century and apparently arising in scientific registers as a way of indicating the speaker's perspective without having to name the speaker directly (e.g. "*botanically*, this is the region of plants"). English *-(c)ally* is recorded in this use from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, but is restricted to Latin or Greek adjectival bases. In the course of the twentieth century, *-wise*, which unlike *-cally* can be combined with nominal roots irrespective of their etymological origin, came to fill this obvious gap in word-formation. Finally, in "The Derivation of Ornative, Locative, Ablative, Privative and Reversative Verbs in English: A Historical Sketch", Kastovsky examines the historical development of five classes of verbs sharing a common cognitive-semantic basis and using the same derivational means: the underlying meaning of ornative (*encrown*), locative (*encage*), ablative (*unsaddle*), privative (*behead*) and reversative (*unlock*) verbs is that some Theme is caused to be located in some Location (e.g. *encage*) or is removed from this Location (e.g. *unseat*). Kastovsky shows that, with the exception of ablative verbs, these semantic categories were well established in Old English. An ablative pattern with *un-*, as in *unsaddle* or *unearth*, emerged in Middle English, probably under the influence of ablative *dis-*formations borrowed from French, such as *dislodge*. In addition, the introduction in Middle and Early Modern English of other Romance/Latin prefixes (*de-*, *en-/em-*) generally strengthened the whole derivational set.

Verbs are also the focus of Möhlig & Klages' "Detransitivization in the History of English from a Semantic Perspective". They adopt a functional framework (Dik 1989, 1997) to look into the historical development from Old English times of four different uses of selected transitive verbs which result in non-transitive constructions. The four patterns of detransitivization in question are co-referential intransitives (*John washed*), ergatives (*the door opened*), generics (*he is wise who reads*) and middles (*this book reads well*). Starting from the functionalist assumption that "the properties of clause structure are predictable from the semantics of predicates" (Faber & Mairal Usón 1999: 37), Möhlig & Klages examine the semantic properties of the verbs involved in these non-transitive presentations of essentially transitive events.

With the paper by Meurman-Solin we move away from Standard English into the fields of dialectology and sociolinguistics. In "The Progressive in Older

Scots" she discusses the use of the progressive in Scots from 1450 onwards, in particular the variants *be doand*, *be doing* and *be in/a doing*, and the linguistic, idiolectal and genre-specific factors affecting their distribution. The frequency of the progressive correlates with the type of discourse: narratives and speech-based texts yield a generally greater number of occurrences of the construction. Regarding the possible influence of Celtic languages on the development of the progressive in English,² Meurman-Solin does not find evidence supporting the existence of a 'Celtic connection' and points out that, despite the size of her corpus (over 850,000 words of running text), to say anything conclusive in this respect an even larger database would be necessary. Among other interesting findings, she suggests that the prepositional type *be in/a doing* may have provided a structure with a passive sense (i.e. 'be being done') at a time when the verbal types did not yet have a passive transform.

We would like to close this brief introduction by thanking the many people and institutions that helped to make the 11th ICEHL a success. Among the former, we are grateful to all those who delivered papers, as well as to the several academics who helped us in the difficult task of selecting from the large number of valuable abstracts submitted the contributions that were accepted for presentation at the conference. Our thanks also to the students who collaborated with the Organizing Committee both before and during the conference. Sponsorship was gratefully received from the Xunta de Galicia (Secretaría Xeral de Investigación e Desenvolvemento and Dirección Xeral de Turismo), the Spanish Ministry of Education and Culture, the University of Santiago de Compostela, the Department of English, the City of Santiago de Compostela, the British Council, the Spanish Association for Canadian Studies (AEEC), and the Fundación Pedro Barrié de la Maza.

Notes

1. The selection process was not an easy task, for the number of papers submitted for publication came to 55.
2. On this issue see Mittendorf & Poppe (2000) and Vennemann (2001).

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