

Alignment and Argument Morphosyntax in Synchrony and Diachrony

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This workshop sets out to explore the relationship between alignment and argument morphosyntax. Alignment is defined as the morphosyntactic realization of arguments in a language. Argument morphosyntax, on the other hand, is taken to involve at least two dimensions of grammar, argumenthood and transitivity prominence. Argumenthood is a cover term for the morphosyntactic properties characteristic of the core arguments of verbal predicates, while transitivity prominence is the extent to which the verbal predicates in a language show the same morphosyntactic marking as core transitive verbs.

Alignment and argumenthood have been intensively explored from the early to mid-1970s onward, a research endeavour that has resulted in an extensive body of research output (cf. e.g., Dixon 1972, 1995, Keenan 1976, Falk 2006, the papers in Donohue and Wichmann (eds.) 2008, Coon et al. (eds.) 2017 and in Dahl (ed.) 2022). Transitivity prominence, on the other hand, has received systematic scholarly attention in relatively recent times (cf. e.g., Bossong 1998, Say 2014, 2017, Haspelmath 2015, Creissels 2018a, 2018b). However, although these works have greatly enhanced our understanding of the three domains of argument morphosyntax, it largely remains unexplored how they interact synchronically and diachronically. For example, Falk's (2006) important study makes a strong case for the claim that some types of subject properties (e.g., control, raising) show an alignment-based alternation in their selection of core argument anchoring, which in some languages is based on an accusatively oriented (S/A) profile and in others on an ergative oriented one (S/P). Other subject properties (e.g., imperative addressee, anaphoric prominence) invariably show an accusatively oriented anchoring across languages and thus are not sensitive to differences in alignment. From a diachronic perspective, this seems to indicate that certain types of alignment properties enhance the grammaticalization of certain subjecthood features, a hypothesis that would be in line with the results of recent investigations into the relationship between grammaticalization and typology (e.g., Narrog 2017, Narrog and Heine (eds.) 2018, Narrog and Heine 2021). Based on a scrutiny of data from a selection of archaic Indo-European languages, Cotticelli and Dahl (2022) argue that there may be a correlation between a high degree of consistency in accusatively oriented case-marking and verb agreement, notably absence of split alignment, and a rich inventory of subjecthood properties. However, their analysis is based on a rather limited comparative basis and restricted to languages with predominantly nominative-accusative alignment, so that more detailed study is needed to arrive at firmer conclusions about interactions between alignment and subjecthood, diachronically and synchronically. Finally, transitivity prominence is a somewhat new field of research but it seems likely that

it systematically interacts with subjecthood, on one hand, and alignment type on the other.

The main aim of this workshop is to bring together scholars interested in alignment, argumenthood, and transitivity prominence to clarify how these three dimensions interact synchronically and diachronically. One set of open questions concerns the synchronic relations between them. For example, it remains to be systematically explored on a broad empirical basis how robust correlations between certain types of alignment systems and certain types of argument properties like the ones identified by Falk (2006) are. A related question is whether there are any systematic differences between languages with split alignment systems and languages with more unitary systems with regard to the inventory of subjecthood properties, as suggested by the observations in Cotticelli and Dahl (2022). A third problem concerns whether there are any correlations between the productivity of oblique arguments and/or non-canonical agreement patterns, that is, transitivity prominence, and consistency in alignment, on one hand, or subjecthood properties, on the other. Another set of problems concerns the diachronic interaction between these dimensions. As pointed out by Creissels (2018a), a common type of split alignment arises as a consequence of newly emerging tense/aspect constructions, e.g., progressive or resultative/anterior categories, which often arise from nominal constructions (c.f., also Dahl 2021). Creissels (2018a) also notes that there is a tendency across languages to generalize one alignment pattern, which he labels 'the obligatory coding principle', which among other things has the effect of leveling out cases of split alignment. It remains an open question in what ways this tendency interacts with other tendencies in the shaping of language-specific alignment systems (cf., however, Dahl 2021 for some pertinent observations). Another, related question concerns the diachrony of argumenthood properties, particularly to what extent certain types of alignment patterns and/or systems facilitate the grammaticalization of certain types of morphosyntactic features characteristic of core arguments. Comparative data discussed in Cotticelli and Dahl (2022) show that even genetically closely related languages show remarkable variation as to what properties constitute subject features, suggesting that argumenthood constitutes a dynamic and emerging realm of grammar rather than a stable inherited set of features in a language family. A third set of problems relate to changes in relative transitivity prominence and to what extent argument realization patterns become more unitary over time or not. Since transitivity prominence is still relatively understudied, it remains largely unexplored whether and to what extent changes in alignment and/or argumenthood impacts the relative transitivity prominence.

These are the research questions that motivate this workshop proposal. If accepted, the workshop will accommodate papers with topics including but not limited to these problems.

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