

A CxG Approach to Germanic Copularization

Marjolein Poortvliet, University of Amsterdam

The copula has received very little treatment in the theoretical and descriptive literature, and constitutes a surprisingly ill-defined grammatical category (Pustet 2003). The most common definition stems from the typological literature, which sees copulas as linking morphemes with no semantic content (Hengeveld 1992).

However, this semantic definition overlooks the syntagmatic context in which the copula as verb systematically appears in many of the world's languages. As such, following Huddleston and Pullum (2002), I define the copula as the verb that appears in *the copular construction*, which minimally takes the form of SUBJ V ADJ, as illustrated in 1 for English. As such, not only English *be* is a copula but also *remain, become, stay, seem, look*, etc.

1. He **is/remains/becomes/seems/looks** angry.

This syntactic approach does not only highlight the idiosyncratic syntactic context in which the copula appears cross-linguistically, it also unites a set of verbs that has developed similarly: the claim that copulas are the product of grammaticalization (e.g. Hengeveld 1992) has been shown to hold for the verbs that appear in the verbal position in 1 (e.g. Diewald and Smirnova 2010, Whitt 2015 for German, e.g. Van Gelderen 2015, Gisborne and Holmes 2007 for English, Vliegen 2011, Poortvliet 2017 for Dutch). In this diachronic process, lexical verbs have *copularized* into the copular construction, each showing remains of their original meaning.

In my current work, I am in search of a framework that provides a satisfying account of Germanic copularization. I am modelling the copularization of Germanic copular constructions in a Construction Grammar framework (CxG, Goldberg 1995), which has recently gained momentum as a new perspective on traditional issues in diachronic linguistics (Barðdal et al. 2015). In this talk, I focus on detecting the critical syntagmatic context which allows for copularization to occur in the Germanic languages (e.g. intransitive verb + adverb > copular verb + adjective). CxG is preferred over other theories of grammaticalization as it assumes that the units to which grammaticalization applies are constructions, not isolated lexical items (Himmelman 2004:31).

References

- Barðdal, J et al. 2015. *Diachronic Construction Grammar*. CAL18. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Diewald, Gabriele and Elena Smirnova. 2010. *Evidentiality in German: linguistic realization and regularities in grammaticalization*. Berlin/New York: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Goldberg, Adele E. 1995 *Constructions: A Construction Grammar Approach to Argument Structure*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Hengeveld, Kees. 1992. *Non-verbal predication: theory, typology, diachrony*. De Gruyter.
- Himmelman, Nikolaus. 2004. Lexicalization and grammaticalization: Opposite or orthogonal? In Bisang, Himmelman & Wiemer (eds.), *What Makes Grammaticalization – A Look from its Fringes*

and its Components, 19–40. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

- Huddleston, Rodney and Geoffrey K. Pullum. 2002. *The Cambridge grammar of English*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Poortvliet, Marjolein. 2017. Grammaticalization of Dutch *klinken*. *Journal of Historical Linguistics*, 7(1/2):190–212
- Pustet, Regina. 2003. *Copulas: Universals in the Categorization of the Lexicon*. Oxford: OUP.
- Van Gelderen, Elly. 2015. The copula cycle. *Lingue e linguaggio*, 14(2):287–01.
- Vliegen, Maurice. 2011. Evidentiality. Dutch *seem* and *appear* verbs: *blijken, lijken, schijnen*. *Linguistics in the Netherlands*, 28: 125–137. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Whitt, Richard J. 2015. On the grammaticalization of inferential evidential meaning: English *seem* and German *scheinen*. *Interdisciplinary Journal for Germanic Linguistics and Semiotic Analysis*, 20(2):233–271.