A comparative study of argument structure and lexicon

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Wednesday, May 16th, 9:00-9:45am, LSK LT1

This work brings together two seemingly disparate phenomena that have hitherto not been treated in the same vain: noun incorporation (NI) in Northern Iroquoian (Mohawk, Cayuga, Onondaga) and non-canonical objects in Mandarin Chinese, building on a novel discovery that the same range of (im)possibilities exists regarding what can undergo noun-incorporation in place of the typical canonical object or what can replace a canonical object in the object position. It will be argued that the (un)availability of such "object usurpers" is related to the absence of morphological case markings, and the licensing of arguments by Ps. The issues have implications for the distinction between analytic and synthetic type of language (Huang, 2005) and the notion of satellite-framed vs. verb-framed languages (Talmy, 2000, among others).

Noun Incorporation: NI in Mohawk and other Northern Iroquoian languages is not restricted to direct objects (Mithun, 1984). Instruments, paths and locations often productively incorporate (and temporals in some cases，sensitive to morphological constraints). Furthermore, adverb incorporation has been attested in other languages with NI (i.e., Chukchi, Spencer, 1995). However, comitatives, sources, benefactives and goals cannot undergo NI in virtually any language. This is the first puzzle.

Non-Canonical Objects: Li (2010) showed that in Mandarin Chinese, bare NPs other than the direct object can appear as though it were a direct object of the verb, without the aid of a preposition. Strikingly, the set of elements that can appear as non-canonical objects is similar to the set of elements that can undergo NI: instruments, paths, locations and temporals. Comitatives, sources, goals and benefactives cannot appear as non-canonical objects in Mandarin Chinese. Thus, the second puzzle is why the set of objects available to NI is almost identical to the set of objects that can appear as non-canonical objects.

Proposal: It will be argued that in Northern Iroquoian and Mandarin Chinese goals, sources, comitatives, and benefactives rely on Ps for both thematic and Case licensing, while instruments, paths, locations, and temporals rely on Ps for Case. The thematic relations associated with the latter set are supplied pragmatically (cf. Borer 2005). This elasticity is afforded by the fact that canonical objects either do not have to appear in the incorporated position in NI languages or do not occur in the object position in Chinese, even though both are argument positions. We relate the two patterns to the lack of (inherent) case markings. No case is assigned in the NI cases and no inherent case is assigned to objects in Chinese. This proposal will be extended to accommodate the fact in English that its N-V compounding (the verb taking the *–ing* or *–er* form) behaves like noun incorporation in Northern Iroquoian languages (no case assignment) and that its lack of non-canonical objects in verb phrases is closely related to the lexical specifications of verbs in this language (Case). The implication of this analysis is that at least in the issues regarding argument structures, languages cannot be categorically classified as analytic or satellite-framed. Rather, it is the properties of the specific constructions that dictate the possibilities and distribution of arguments.