

Argument structure and language contact

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Talk IDS, Mannheim – 5 February 2018 (Abstract)

This paper presents research conducted within the DFG-funded BASICS project (<https://sites.google.com/site/dfgbasics/>) and investigates possible contact influence on argument structure change in later medieval England, taking Middle English as the Target Language of influence. An acquisitional context for the maintenance of the Source Language (Anglo-Norman French) existed until the mid-14th century, accompanied by multiple channels of diffusion of French-derived innovations. At this time, intense French lexical influence on Middle English occurred (Dekeyser 1986), including verb lexis, and we ask what consequences this may have had for the syntax of verbs. Two types of outcome are considered: replication (Heine & Kuteva 2005) of the loan verb's SL argument structure, or accommodation of the verb to the TL argument structure, without innovation. Loan verbs in modern German appear only in TL German frames (Holler 2015), prompting the question whether such conservatism has also been the case in the history of English.

Three argument structure classes are considered: change of state/position verbs, psych verbs and dative verbs. Source data are taken from the very numerous citations in the Middle English Dictionary; the Anglo-Norman Dictionary is used for SL comparison.

Patient-lability was common among Old French change of state/position verbs (Heidinger 2010), and is found increasingly with these Middle English verb classes. By the end of the ME period, nearly three-quarters of the change of state/position verbs then in use are attested as labile, as opposed to only a small minority in Old English (van Gelderen 2011). However, among Miura's (2014) Middle English verbs of emotion (psych verbs), no such increase in lability is found to have taken place during this period. This difference is traced to the same tendency in mediaeval French, in which lability with psych verbs sharply declined after the 12th c.; the converse pattern is found with anticausativization using a reflexive pronoun, which again followed Old French developments. It is noted that anticausativization in Scandinavian did not have the right properties to have influenced English argument structure in the relevant semantic domains (Cennamo et al. 2015).

The *to*-dative was extended in Middle English to verbs of giving, in accordance with the Old French pattern, and to the Experiencer argument of psych verbs whose French counterparts took the *à*-dative. However, where Old French equivalents of OE dative-taking psych verbs did not take an Experiencer prepositional dative, the Experiencer argument appeared as a DP. The selectivity of *to*-dative marking in relation to dative arguments thus suggests that Anglo-Norman French again provided a replication source for this development.

It is concluded that A-N provided the model for innovative replication of the recipient *to*-dative construction, of the psych verb reflexive construction, and for the highly productive lability of change of state/position verbs. The timing of the changes, in the 13th-14th centuries when French influence was strongest, and when bilingualism amongst educated classes favoured contact effects (Ingham 2012), appears significant.

Nevertheless, internal factors should not be neglected. The spread of the *to*-dative to the possession-transfer context combined French contact influence with a probable internal developmental tendency which is also seen in other Germanic languages. Likewise, the reflexive anticausative with some psych verbs, and Patient-lability with change of state/position verbs were attested to some extent in Old English. Internally and externally caused changes are thus not mutually exclusive, but may work together, with contact influence of loan verb structures providing a 'multiplier effect' on native items in the relevant verb classes.