

Hungering and Lusting for Women and Fleshly Delicacies: Reconstructing Grammatical Relations for Proto-Germanic

Syntactic reconstruction has virtually been outlawed in historical-comparative research for a long time, more or less ever since Watkins' (1964, 1976) influential work on the problems of reconstructing word order for Proto-Indo-European (cf. Jeffers 1976, Lightfoot 1979, 2002, 2006, Winter 1984, Harrison 2003, Pires & Thomason 2008, Mengden 2008, inter alia). Recently, through the emergence of Construction Grammar, where complex syntactic structures are regarded as form–function pairings, a resurgence of syntactic reconstruction is made possible, as complex syntactic structures become a legitimate object of the Comparative Method (cf. Barðdal & Eythórsson 2011).

Given the legitimacy of syntactic reconstruction, and hence the possible reconstruction of argument structure constructions, a major question arises as to whether also grammatical relations are reconstructable for earlier undocumented language periods. We argue that if the constructions singling out grammatical relations can be reconstructed for a proto-branch, the grammatical relations following from these are also reconstructable for that proto-branch. In order to illustrate our methodology, we show how a reconstruction of the subject function in Proto-Germanic may be carried out, more specifically of predicates selecting for oblique subjects, like ‘hunger’, ‘thirst’, ‘lust’ and others.

Starting from the subject behavior in the Modern Germanic languages, we have investigated seven different subject properties: Clause-Bound Reflexivization, Long-Distance Reflexivization, Conjunction Reduction, Subject-to-Object raising, Subject-to-Subject raising, Control Infinitives and, finally, Clause-initial Position and Subject-verb Inversion. Three of these behavioral properties, Clause-Bound Reflexivization, Long-Distance Reflexivization, and Conjunction Reduction, are not reconstructable for Proto-Germanic for different reasons. However, the remaining four behavioral properties clearly single out the subject relation, as opposed the object relation (cf. Eythórsson & Barðdal 2005), in all the three branches of Germanic, i.e. North Germanic, West Germanic and East Germanic.

Of these four subject behaviors, Control Infinitives are unanimously taken to be the most conclusive subject test crosslinguistically. In addition to the well-known examples from Old Norse-Icelandic, Old Swedish and Early Middle English, we present an indisputable example of the verb *luston* ‘lust, desire’ occurring in such a control infinitive in 5th century Gothic. This verb selects for the Acc-Gen case frame, and it is the accusative subject-like argument that is being left unexpressed in this control infinitive, on the basis of a nominative subject in the matrix clause. This example therefore shows that oblique subjects in Germanic already behaved syntactically like subjects as early as in Gothic. Thus, it is incontrovertible that subject-like obliques behaved syntactically like nominative subjects in the early daughters of all three subbranches of Germanic, and are as such reconstructable for Proto-Germanic.

By using the Comparative Method in syntax, we show that there are systematic correspondences found in argument structure constructions and other syntactic constructions across the early Germanic daughter languages. The reconstruction will be modeled with the formalism of Sign-Based Construction Grammar (Sag 2011, Michaelis 2010, 2011), and both argument structure constructions and the constructions singling out the subject relation will be reconstructed for a common Germanic proto-stage.

References:

- Barðdal, Jóhanna & Thórhallur Eythórsson. 2011. Reconstructing Syntax: Construction Grammar and the Comparative Method. To appear in *Sign-Based Construction Grammar*. Eds. H. C. Boas & I. A. Sag. Stanford: CSLI Publications.
- Eythórsson, Thórhallur & Jóhanna Barðdal. 2005. Oblique Subjects: A Common Germanic Inheritance. *Language* 81(4): 824–881.
- Harrison, S. P. 2003. On the Limits of the Comparative Method. In *The Handbook of Historical Linguistics*, eds. B. D. Joseph & R. D. Janda, 343–368. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Jeffers, Robert J. 1976. Syntactic Change and Syntactic Reconstruction. In *Current Progress in Historical Linguistics: Proceedings of the Second International Conference on Historical Linguistics*, ed. William M. Christie, Jr., 1–15, Amsterdam.
- Lightfoot, David. 1979. *Principles of Diachronic Syntax*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lightfoot, David W. 2002. Myths and the Prehistory of Grammars. *Journal of Linguistics* 38(1): 113–136.
- Lightfoot, David. 2006. *How New Languages Emerge*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mengden, Ferdinand von. 2008. Reconstructing Complex Structures: A Typological Perspective. In *Principles of Syntactic Reconstruction*. Eds. Gisela Ferraresi & Maria Goldbach, 97–119. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Michaelis, Laura A. 2010. Sign-Based Construction Grammar. In *The Oxford Handbook of Linguistic Analysis*, eds. B. Heine & H. Narrog, 155–176. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Michaelis, Laura A. 2011. Making the Case for Construction Grammar. To appear in *Sign-Based Construction Grammar*. Eds. Hans C. Boas & Ivan A. Sag. Stanford: CSLI Publications.
- Pires, Acrisio & Sarah G. Thomason. 2008. How Much Syntactic Reconstruction is Possible? In *Principles of Syntactic Reconstruction*. Eds. Gisela Ferraresi & Maria Goldbach, 27–72. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Sag, Ivan. 2011. Sign-Based Construction Grammar: An Informal Synopsis. To appear in *Sign-Based Construction Grammar*. Eds. Hans C. Boas & Ivan A. Sag. Stanford: CSLI Publications.
- Watkins, Calvert. 1964. Preliminaries to the reconstruction of Indo-European sentence structure. In *Proceedings of the IX International Congress of Linguists*, ed. H. G. Lunt, 1035–1045. The Hague: Mouton.
- Watkins, Calvert. 1976. Toward Proto-Indo-European syntax: Problems and pseudoproblems. In *Proceedings of the Chicago Linguistics Society: Papers from the parasession on diachronic syntax*, 305–326. Eds. S. B. Steever, C. A. Walker and S. S. Mufwene. Chicago: Chicago Linguistics Society.
- Winter, Werner. 1984. Reconstructional comparative linguistics and the reconstruction of the syntax of undocumented stages in the development of languages and language families. In *Historical Syntax*, 613–625. Ed. J. Fisiak. The Hague: Mouton.