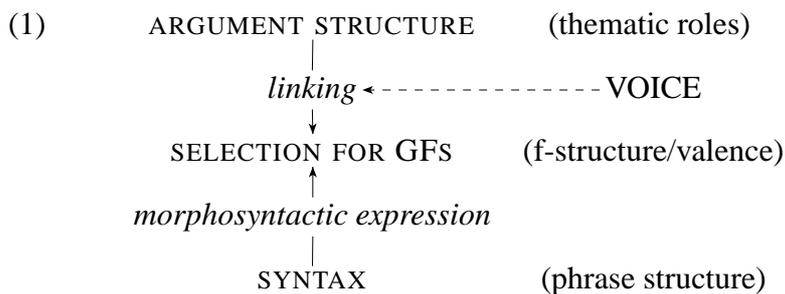


Symmetries and Asymmetries in Voice Systems

Typological Overview

A fundamental idea about voice alternations is that they provide asymmetries in ‘argument prominence’ (see e.g. Legendre, Raymond and Smolensky 1993), that is, about providing forms which give more prominence to one argument over another (Sells 2001), as part of a system in any one language. In this talk I will present a cross-linguistic approach to voice from the perspective of a parallel structure theory like LFG or HPSG, where voice relates arguments and valence properties, potentially separate from the surface morphosyntactic forms of any given language.



This approach is motivated by voice systems which are more complex than the basic Accusative/Passive or Ergative/Antipassive ones. For example, there are non-demotional voice systems. Philippine languages typically have a ‘symmetric’ voice system, where neither argument has to be (or can be) demoted in order to make the other subject (Sells 1998). Such languages cannot be classified as either ergative or accusative, as they allow both types, using the terms ‘Actor’ and ‘Undergoer’ for the two arguments of a transitive verb:

- (2) a. Actor Voice: Actor is Subject, Undergoer is Object (‘accusative’ linking)
 b. Undergoer Voice: Actor is Object, Undergoer is Subject (‘ergative’ linking)

In addition, many languages of the wider Austronesian family augment the system in (2) with a Passive, as in Balinese (Manning and Arka 1998), or Pangutaran Sama (Walton 1986), among others, shown in (3)–(4). Sama has the unmarked order V–Actor–Undergoer, regardless of voice. The subject is unmarked or NOM and the object is GEN:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>(3) a. ∅-bəlli ku taumpa’.
 UndV-buy 1sg.GEN shoe
 ‘I bought the shoes.’</p> | <p>b. N-bəlli aku taumpa’.
 ActV.buy 1sg.NOM shoe
 ‘I bought some shoes.’</p> |
| <p>(4) a. ∅-bəlla dənda kiyakan kami.
 UndV-cook girl food 1pl.GEN
 ‘The girl cooked our food.’</p> | <p>b. b-i-lla (uk dənda) kiyakan kami.
 Pass.cook (by girl) food 1pl.GEN
 ‘Our food was cooked (by the girl).’</p> |

Interestingly, if we characterize Passive and Antipassive with the apparently equal and opposite properties in (5), there appear to be no languages with the symmetric system in (2) which also have Antipassive, though there are many with Passive.

- (5) a. Passive: demote the Actor b. Antipassive: demote the Undergoer

