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A Construction Grammar approach to grammatical change

The central question of this talk concerns the challenge of capturing, in a systematic way, the dynamic nature of linguistic structure and the gradience of grammatical change. The basic premise of my approach is the hypothesis that change in grammatical organization can be adequately articulated only as a gradual conventionalization of patterns of understanding, in which morpho-semantic structure, syntactic function, communicative function, and lexical meaning form an integrated whole. The talk explores specifically the viability of Construction Grammar as a tool of diachronic analysis: while the model was originally designed for synchronic purposes, its architecture and basic assumptions hold great promise for helping us be more precise in articulating the *emergence* of grammatical structure, instead of just comparing discrete synchronic stages. The theoretical and representational issues will be illustrated on the basis of a lexico-grammatical change that straddles the derivation/inflection distinction and has consequences for syntactic patterning as well as categoriality: I will analyze the functional shift(s) in a particular 'long' participial form in Old Czech and the observed changes will revolve around the interplay between internal morphosemantic structure of a word-form and its grammatical and textual function in larger syntagmatic strings. Through a close analysis of specific semantic, pragmatic, and morpho-syntactic features involved in the change, my goal is to identify specific recurring semantic and pragmatic constraints that motivated the gradual reorganization of the relevant grammatical patterns.