Argument referencing and valence alternations without valence

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Boas (1909, 436) describes prefixes that reference semantic arguments in Iroquoian as incorporated pronouns, i.e., treats those prefixes as having the same function as overt subject and object pronouns in Indo-European languages. This view has had a long tradition in linguistics, across frameworks and for a range of languages (see, among others, Bresnan & Mchombo (1987) for Bantu pronominal objects and Lexical Functional Grammar, Davies (1981) for Choctaw and Relational Grammar, Evans (2002) for Bininj Gun-wok, Jelinek (1984) for Walpiri, Van Valin & Lapolla (1997) for Lakhota and Role and Reference Grammar). Haspelmath (2013) points out some of the challenges of such a view as well as for the alternative view that argument referencing prefixes are agreement markers with null pronominals (Baker, 1996).

In the first part of this talk, I expand on previous work in HPSG in the tradition initiated by Miller & Sag (1997) and suggest that morphological argument referencing prefixes are the exponents of inflectional features and never *realize* arguments (in the sense of Levin & Rappaport Hovav (2005); see Evans (2002) for suggestions they are not anaphoric either, contra Mithun 2003). They thus constitute a *sui generis* expression of properties of semantic arguments and the features they expound are morphomic in nature (Aronoff, 1994). The evidence I present in favor of this claim is similar to the evidence adduced in the 90s to support the distinction between argument-structure and valence (Manning & Sag, 1999): morphological argument referencing features can be dissociated from argument structure or valence subjects and objects. More specifically, paradigm classes of argument referencing features can criss-cross argument structure subjects and objects in Soranî Kurdish (see the talk by Salehi & Koenig) or not correspond to argument structure members at all (Koenig & Michelson, 2015). Thus, although argument referencing features most often align with argument structure subjects and objects (and, indirectly, overt subjects and objects), they need not to nor do they even need to be linked to argument structure subjects or objects. Boas was wrong: Iroquoian argument referencing prefixes are not incorporated pronouns. Nor are they agreement affixes as Baker has claimed. Argument referencing prefixes are the exponents of morphomic inflectional features.

In the second part of this talk, I show that Oneida includes derivational processes whose effect resembles semantic conditions on valence alternations discussed in Pinker (1989) and Davis (2001) and displays similar polysemy patterns, despite the fact that Oneida is a language without argument structure or valence, according to Koenig & Michelson. If correct, this data supports the view that many valence alternations are merely the syntactic reflexes of *semantic* alternations, a common view within HPSG (Davis et al., 2021); it also supports the distinction between morpholexical and morphosyntactic rules proposed in Ackerman (1992). Languages can include similar meaning-altering lexical rules without including similar constraints between semantic content and syntactic dependents. Oneida includes derivational rules that map one kind of eventuality description onto another in a way similar to some English valence alternations, but does not include constraints that link meanings to argument structure or argument structure to valence. Overall, the research I present in this talk supports positing multiple representational levels (in the sense of Ladusaw 1988), as is common in HPSG where properties of semantic arguments are recorded in the value of multiple attributes (ARG-ST, CONTENT, SLASH, SUBJ/COMPS, INFL, . . .). Multiplying levels allows for the modeling of ordinary relations as well as dissociations between representational levels (local syntactic dependents, unbounded syntactic dependents, inflectional affixes) and provides a better account of similarities of languages that are otherwise very different in their grammars.

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