Labile verbs and transitivity oppositions in diachrony: Evidence from Indo-European and beyond

Workshop organizers:
Leonid Kulikov – Krzysztof Stroński (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań)

The aim of the workshop is investigation of encoding of transitivity oppositions, with special focus on lability and labile verbs over time. While numerous works deal with synchronic syntax of transitivity and labile verbs in the languages of the world, the diachronic aspects of these phenomena are most often neglected or underestimated in linguistic and typological research. We invite proposals addressing topics related to transitivity and lability in diachrony from different methodological perspectives, in order to uncover and clarify the paths and mechanisms of the emergence and disappearance of labile verbs as well as morphological and syntactic changes in the domain of encoding of transitivity oppositions in the languages of the world.

DESCRIPTION AND AIMS

The term 'labile' refers to verbs or verbal forms which can show valency alternation, i.e. changes in syntactic pattern, with no formal change in the verb. Very often it is only employed in narrower sense, to denote the verbs which can be employed both transitively and intransitively, as in (1-3) exemplifying Patient-preserving lability (P-lability) or in (4) instantiating Agent-preserving lability (A-lability):

(1) English
  a. Peter *broke* the cup
  b. The cup *broke*

(2) French
  a. Il *tourna* la clé dans la serrure
     he turned ART key in ART lock
     'He turned the key in the lock.'

  b. La clé *tourna* dans la serrure
     ART key turned in ART lock
     'The key turned in the lock.'

(3) Vedic Sanskrit
  a. rudrā r̥tásya sádaneṣu *vāvr̥dhuḥ*
     Rudra.NOM.PL truth.GEN.SG residence.LOC.PL grow.PERF.3PL.ACT
     'Rudras *have grown* [intransitive] in the residences of the truth'.

  b. índram ukthāni *vāvr̥dhuḥ*
     Indra.ACC.SG hymn.NOM.PL grow.PERF.3PL.ACT
     'The hymns *have made* Indra *grow* [transitive-causative]'.

(4) English
　　a. John *ate* porridge
　　b. John *ate*

Other types of syntactic alternation, such as locative alternation (cf. John *sprayed* paint on the wall ~ John *sprayed* the wall with paint) or dative shift (Mary *gave* John an apple ~ Mary *gave* an apple to John) are usually treated separately from P- and A-lability. Of particular interest is P-lability, common in ergative-absolutive languages or languages showing semantic alignment (for instance, in many Daghestan languages), but quite frequent also in some nominative-accusative languages (such as English or Greek), though (almost) entirely lacking in many others (e.g. in Armenian, Turkic or Uralic).

The recent decades are marked with a considerable progress in general and typological study of the encoding of transitivity oppositions in general (see, among others, Geniušiene 1989; Kittilä 2002; Naess 2007, to name just a few) and the systems of labile verbs, in particular, both in individual languages, such as English (e.g. Levin & Rappaport-Hovav 2005; McMillion 2006) or French (Larjavaara 2000), and in cross-linguistic perspective (Nichols et al. 2004; Letuchiy 2013). Impressive results are achieved in the synchronic study of the systems of the categories responsible for encoding transitivity oppositions, such as voice and other valency-changing categories: causative and anticausative, reflexive, reciprocal. By now, we have at our disposal rich catalogues of the morphological, syntactic and semantic features of these categories in the languages of the world. Thanks to these studies, our understanding of transitivity phenomena has dramatically increased. Since the seminal work by Hopper & Thompson (1980), the notion of transitivity has played a major role in the study of these and related categories. Moreover, studies in basic valency orientation (cf. Nichols et al. 2004) have attempted a typological classification of languages based on their preferred patterns of encoding valency increase ad reduction.

Much less attention was paid to the diachronic aspects of transitivity oppositions, in particular, to the mechanisms of the evolution of labile verbs. We do not know why in several languages labile verbs become more productive and the class of labile verbs is constantly increasing (as in English or Greek), while in some other languages this class is decreasing (as in Indo-Iranian languages) or entirely lacking (as in Armenian or Turkic languages). Only a few mechanisms responsible for the emergence of lability (such as the phonetic merger of transitive and intransitive forms or the deletion of the reflexive pronoun, attested in the history of English) are mentioned in the literature. The few studies dealing with the diachronic aspects of labile verbs, their rise, development or decay and loss include Kitazume 1996 (on English), Kulikov 2003 (on Vedic Sanskrit), Lavidas 2004 (on Greek) and Kulikov & Lavidas (eds) 2014 (labile verbs in cross-linguistic perspective).

The aim of the workshop is to bring together scholars working on lability and other phenomena related to encoding of transitivity oppositions, paying special attention to its diachronic aspects and thus opening up new horizons in the research of these phenomena in both (1) languages (language families) with well-documented history (such as, first of all, Indo-European or Semitic) and (2) languages which furnish less historical evidence but, nevertheless, can provide us with some valuable data on the basis of comparison of daughter languages and linguistic reconstruction (such as Uralic).

Possible **TOPICS** to be addressed at the workshop include (but are not limited to):

- theoretical and descriptive aspects of a study of labile verbs;
- diachronic changes within the systems of encoding of transitivity oppositions;
- labile verbs over time;
- lability considered as an instance of syncretism (transitive/intransitive) and its possible relationships with other types of syncretism;
- mechanisms of the emergence of labile verbs (as in Germanic languages);
- mechanisms of decline and disappearance of labile verbs (as in Indo-Iranian);
- semantic and syntactic classes of verbs for which the labile patterning is particularly common or uncommon;
- correlations between the grammatical characteristics of a form and its lability;
- changes in argument structure constructions over time;
- types of lability (e.g. reflexive lability: *Mary washed the baby ~ Mary washed*; reciprocal lability: *Mary and John kissed the baby ~ Mary and John kissed*; etc.) in synchronic and diachronic perspective;
- productivity, expansion and decline of syntactic patterns over time;
- paths of development of valency changing markers in individual languages;
- reconstructing basic valency orientation and lability in proto-languages;
- possible sources of valency changing markers and patterns of polysemy;
- changes in basic valency orientation over time;
- the role of language contacts in the development of valency-changing derivations;
- the position of Indo-European and other language families in a diachronic typological classification of lability types;
- creation of digital resources for the diachronic study of transitivity oppositions and labile verbs.

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

We invite submission of **abstracts up to 500 words** (the title, linguistic examples and references not included), describing original, unpublished research related to the topics of the workshop. Please submit your abstracts in in PDF format through the EasyChair system. Further instructions can be found on the Website of PLM2018 (http://wa.amu.edu.pl/plm/2018/Abstract_submission).

The **DEADLINE FOR THE SUBMISSION** of abstracts is **20 March 2018**.

WORKSHOP ORGANIZERS:
Leonid Kulikov: kulikovli@googlemail.com (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań)
Krzysztof Stroński: stroniu@amu.edu.pl (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań)

REFERENCES

Geniušienė, E. 1987. *The typology of reflexives*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Hopper, P. J. and S.A. Thompson. 1980. Transitivity in grammar and discourse. *Language* 56.2: 251–299.

Kitazume, S. 1996. Middles in English. *Word* 47: 161-183.

Kittilä, S. 2002. *Transitivity: Towards a comprehensive typology.* Turku/Åbo: Åbo Akademis Tryckeri.

Kulikov, L. 2003. The labile syntactic type in a diachronic perspective: the case of Vedic". *SKY Journal of Linguistics* 16: 93-112.

Kulikov, L. & N. Lavidas. (guest-eds) 2014. *Typology of labile verbs: Focus on diachrony* (*Linguistics* 52.4: Special issue).

Larjavaara, M. 2000. *Présence ou absence de l'objet. Limites du possible en français contemporain*. Helsinki: Helsingin yliopiston verkkojulkaisut.

Lavidas, N. 2004. Causative alternations: synchronic and diachronic tendencies. *Studies in Greek Language* 24: 369-381.

Letuchiy, A. 2013. *Tipologija labil'nyx glagolov* [A typology of labile verbs]. Moscow: Jazyki slav. kul'tur.

Levin, B. and M. Rappaport-Hovav. 2005. *Argument realization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

McMillion, A. 2006. *Labile Verbs in English: their Meaning, Behavior and Structure*. PhD Dissertation, Stockholm University.

Næss, Å. 2007. *Prototypical Transitivity*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.

Nichols, J., D.A. Peterson and J. Barnes. 2004. Transitivizing and detransitivizing languages. *Linguistic Typology* 8.2: 149–211.