

Universal Clines and Cycles of Meaning Change

This talk discusses linguistic clines and cycles of meaning change that are pragmatically and cognitively motivated, arguing that a linguistic cycle is a process that involves more than one linguistic cline occurring consecutively: Either a cycle that 'reclaims linguistic glory' ($A \rightleftarrows B$) i.e., moving backwards in order to 'counter-loosen' a certain meaning/function (for 'counter-loosening' see Bardenstein and Ariel 2022) ; or a cline that 'recycles' ($A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C \rightarrow$) i.e., moving forward with an initially implicit function that turns explicit (involving processes of constructionalization and grammaticalization) forming a 'polysemy' or 'poly functional' item, and this explicitness can, in turn, become even more explicit via the same persistent function (for 'persistent function' see Bardenstein 2021). These two types of cycles correlate with what are generally referred to in the literature as 'onomasiological cycles' and 'semasiological cycles' (see Hansen 2018, 2020). Therefore, it is not only cycles' motivations and mechanism of change that are quite predictable and similar cross-linguistically, but it is also the 'bigger picture'- the overall functionally persistent shift from the implicit to the explicit and from explicit into 'more explicit' that is cyclic and can be referred to as 'universal'.

The structure of the talk will be as follows: I shall start with outlining and mapping five pragmatic-cognitive motivations for semantic change, followed by investigating the mechanisms of change that are triggered by the above motivations and claim that in all five cases, processes of grammaticalization and constructionalization are involved but these come to be via a core persistent function that is initially implicit and turns explicit in a potentially cyclic manner.