Abstract

The aim of this talk is to define, exemplify and problematize the lexico-semantic aspects of areality cum language convergence. Just like with areal linguistics at large, this subfield is an intersection of a number of more general approaches: the study of language contact, language change and typological research. Particularly prominent in our treatment is the cross-fertilization of meticulous documentation of linguistic features in specific geographical regions or areas, often grounded in fieldwork, and large-scale cross-linguistic findings and generalizations.

Areal semantics as concerned with the diffusion of semantic features across language boundaries in a geographical area is a potentially vast field, spanning from the convergence of individual lexemes, through the structuring of entire semantic domains to the organization of entire lexicons. For practical reasons, we have largely excluded the two extreme ends of that continuum. At the lower end, loanwords, or the spread of individual vocabulary forms, will only feature when it also involves co-lexicalization or the diffusion of area-specific concepts. At the higher end, we will largely exclude features defining the lexicon at large, such as very general derivational mechanisms or the proportion of verbs vs. nouns, sometimes referred to as the lexical profile of a language. The latter is related to an attempt to uphold a distinction between grammar and lexicon, also reflected in our decision to exclude grammaticalization per se from our discussion.

Our choice of the focus for the talk is to a large degree motivated by a desire to attend to the issues that have so far received relatively little attention in theoretical discussions on areal linguistics (cf. Ameka and Wilkins 1996, Matisoff 2004). As a consequence, we will hardly be able to report on generalisations comparable to those accumulated in research on “material” borrowings or on contact induced grammaticalisation. The talk will give an overview of a number of lexico-semantic phenomena that have been shown to serve as indicators of areality and include a case study of semantic patterns in the Hindukush region. The phenomena dealt with are
lexico-semantic parallels, in their turn subdivided into polysemy calquing and lexico-constructional calquing, shared formulaic expressions, area-specific lexicalizations and a shared or similar-looking internal organization of certain semantic domains. We will also discuss causality and possible mechanisms behind obvious correlations between lexico-semantic phenomena and geographically contiguous areas: inheritance, diffusion, shared environment and independent innovation.

Vi önskar alla hjärtligt välkomna till seminariet och till postseminarium efteråt!

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