BCGL 15
Argument Structure, Theta-roles, and Their Realization

The Center for Research in Syntax, Semantics, and Phonology (CRISSP) of KU Leuven invites abstracts for the 15th edition of the Brussels Conference on Generative Linguistics (BCGL 15), to be held on 6-7 October 2022. The conference will take place in Brussels. The theme of BCGL 15 is Argument Structure, Theta-roles, and Their Realization.

A tradition within Generative Grammar holds that syntactic structure and semantics interact in a systematic way such that event participants assigned theta-roles like AGENT, PATIENT/THEME, GOAL, and so on, associate with certain syntactic positions. This is exemplified in Baker's (1988) Uniformity of Theta Assignment Hypothesis (UTAH), which required particular theta-roles to be assigned in particular structural positions, a requirement presumed to hold at D(eep)-Structure within GOVERNMENT AND BINDING THEORY. With the advent of the MINIMALIST PROGRAM and the dispensing of levels of representation in the syntax, argument structure alternations present a challenge for such a view. Take for example a passive construction, illustrated here using Greek with the active and passive constructions in (1a) and (1b) respectively:

(1) a. I astinomia sinelave tin Maria.
the police.NOM arrested.ACT.3SG the Maria.ACC
'The police arrested Maria.'

b. I Maria sinelifthi (apo tin astinomia).
the Maria.NOM arrested.NACT.3SG by the police.ACC
'Maria was arrested by the police.'

Major questions regarding the analysis of passives concern the syntactic status of the so called *by*-phrase that introduces the agent argument as well as the differing position of the theme argument. The general consensus is that passivization causes the theme argument to be promoted to subject position while the agent argument is demoted and becomes optional, requiring the preposition *apo* to be introduced overtly. Given that the arguments are syntactically aligned differently across the active and the passive, what then is the status of principles like UTAH? Focusing on the external agent argument, we can distinguish two broad views:

- **View 1:** Assume that Baker's (1988) UTAH effects do hold, meaning that the agent argument is introduced in the same syntactic position in both the active and passive. One proposed implementation is to assume that the *by*-phrase forms a constituent, with *by* spelling out a case head K that takes the DP as its complement. This constituent is merged in Spec,vP, exactly the same structural position the DP external argument in the active is introduced (cf. Angelopoulos et al. 2020, Roberts 2019 i.a.). This means that the agent argument is not only introduced and assigned its AGENT theta-role in the same structural position, but also has the syntactic status of an argument, identical to its status in the active. Evidence cited for this position come from the observations that *by*-phrases in passives can only bear a theta-role that the corresponding DP argument of the active can possibly bear (Baker et al., 1989), and that *by*-phrases of passives bind reflexives, a property standardly attributed to A-positions (cf. Angelopoulos et al. 2020, Collins 2005, Roberts 2019 i.a.). Another consequence then is that active-passive morphology is not localized to the head that introduces the agent argument, since this head is invariant in its argument-introducing properties across the active-passive alternation. Rather, passive morphology is localized in higher functional heads, such as Collins's VOICE head that syntactically selects for the external-argument introducing head.

- **View 2:** Dispense with principles like UTAH and the assumption of a one-to-one mapping between theta-roles and syntactic position. One way of accounting for the active-passive alternation under such a view is that of Legate (2014). The active construction involves the functional head Voice, following Kratzer (1996), which introduces the external argument in its specifier and endows it with its thematic interpretation of Agent. In the passive, Voice does not introduce an argument syntactically in its specifier and the semantic argument position of Voice is existentially closed. Should the optional *by*-phrase be present, it is merged as an adjunct phrase rather than as an argument (cf. Bruening 2013). The agent argument is hence introduced in a different structural position and with a different structural status than in the active construction, running counter to UTAH. Non-active morphology is furthermore tied to the syntactic properties of Voice as either projecting a specifier or not (Embick, 1998; Alexiadou et al., 2015). This view has been fruitfully extended to account for similar alternations in different constructions. For instance, it has been noted that morphological causative constructions across different languages alternate in exactly the same way as active-passive pairs, with the causee argument either introduced as a DP, or with prepositions or dative morphology as adjunct-like phrases. Analyses of such alternations in diverse languages using the basic tenets of **View 2** include Nie (2020) in Tagalog, Myler and Mali (2021) in isiXhosa, and Akkuş (to appear) in Sason Arabic. **View 2** therefore opens up the possibility that passives are just one instantiation of a more general phenomenon, which is the (in)ability of various heads that introduce arguments in the extended verbal projection to project a specifier.

Amidst this backdrop, we revisit the overarching question: What are the underlying relations between the syntax and the semantics of predicates and their arguments? Are theta-roles associated with certain syntactic positions in natural language? What is the status of principles like the UTAH in current linguistic theory?

We invite abstracts that attempt to shed light on these issues by examining argument structure alternations and their shapes and forms across different languages. A non-exhaustive list of questions that can be examined is provided below:

- What is the range of variation regarding argument structure alternations that seem to morpho-syntactically look like active-passive alternations? Do we find similar alternations in constructions like causatives and elsewhere and what are the different mechanisms underlying these alternations (e.g., Kallulli 2007)? How do these shed light on the debate between **View 1** and **View 2**?

- What is the status of the arguments that are left implicit across different kinds of argument structure alternations (e.g.,short passives, anticausatives, 'passive' causatives, etc.)? Are they syntactically present and if so, what is their syntactic status, e.g. pro, PRO, etc.?

- What are the evidence and diagnostics used to determine if the arguments that syntactically align differently across alternations are introduced as arguments or adjuncts?

- What can morphology, e.g. non-active morphology in the passive, dative causees, etc. tell us about the syntactic structure of pairs that participate in argument structure alternations? Are there semantic effects of these morphological changes (e.g., adversative, affected interpretations of the promoted theme argument in passives cross-linguistically) and what is the range of such effects across languages?

Invited speakers

- Elena Anagnostopoulou, University of Crete

- Chris Collins, New York University

- Dalina Kallulli & Ian Roberts, University of Cambridge & University of Vienna

- Yining Nie, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

Abstract Guidelines

Abstracts should not exceed two pages, including data, references, and diagrams. Abstracts should be typed in at least 11-point font, with one-inch margins (letter-size; 8.5 by 11 inch or A4) and a maximum of 50 lines of text per page. Abstracts must be anonymous and submissions are limited to 2 per author, at most one of which is single-authored. Only electronic submissions will be accepted. Please submit your abstract using the EasyChair link for BCGL15: `https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=bcgl15`

Dates

- First call for papers: April 13, 2022
- Second call for papers: May 13, 2022
- Abstract submission deadline: June 1, 2022
- Notification of acceptance: July 10-15, 2022
- Conference: October 6-7, 2022

Conference Webpage

`https://www.crissp.be/bcgl-15-argument-structure/`

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