

Towards a diachronic typology of middle voice systems

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Description and aims:

The middle voice is a grammatical domain whose complexity has long puzzled scholars, as it lies at the cross-roads between the grammatical domain of voice phenomena and the structure of the lexicon. In spite of the existing typological work on the topic, there is no systematic diachronic typology of this domain, so that we only have an impressionistic understanding of how middle voice systems emerge and develop in the world's languages. This workshop aims at filling in this gap, by combining the study of individual languages with a cross-linguistic view on middle voice systems, both in a synchronic and diachronic perspective (see below for the specific research questions and possible topics).

Cross-linguistic research on the middle voice has shown that from a synchronic standpoint middle voice systems (MVSs) typically feature a split distribution, to the extent that in individual languages middle markers (MMs) can act as valency changing markers with some verbs but also display an obligatory lexically specific distribution with others (see e.g. Kemmer 1993, Manney 2000, Kazenin 2001, Kaufmann 2007, Calude 2017, Zúñiga & Kittilä 2019, Inglese *forthc.*). These two classes of verbs can be referred to as oppositional and non-oppositional middles.

Typical functions of oppositional middles include valency changing operations like anticausative, passive, reflexive, reciprocal, impersonal, and involuntary agent constructions (cf. Dixon & Aikhenvald 2000, Kulikov 2010, Zúñiga & Kittilä 2019). Non-oppositional middles show a consistent distribution across languages, as they tend to occur with a specific cluster of situation types: grooming verbs, verbs of position and of change in body posture, verbs of (non-)translational motions, verbs of speech, cognition, and emotion, and spontaneous events (cf. Kemmer 1993). Kemmer (1993) was among the first scholars to suggest that this distribution across grammatical functions and lexical classes is not random. Generalizing over the situation types covered by language-specific MMs, Kemmer reached the conclusion that the middle domain can be cross-linguistically characterized as a “coherent but relatively diffused category that comprises a set of loosely linked semantic subdomains” (*ibid.*: 238). She further argues that the reason why languages group all these situations under the same coding is that they all share the common functional property of *low degree of elaboration of events*, whereby middle situations feature participants and sub-events that are not fully distinguishable.

In spite of the existing synchronic typology, diachronic studies of the middle remain few, to the effect that nowadays there is no comprehensive diachronic typology of MVSs. Existing studies focus almost exclusively on the diachrony of individual valency changing functions (e.g. passives [Haspelmath 1990, Wiemer 2011], anticausative [Haspelmath 1993], reflexives [König & Siemund 2000, Schladt 2000], reciprocals [Heine & Miyashita 2008], antipassives [Sansò 2017]). What is lacking in most of these studies, however, is a careful consideration of how oppositional, i.e. grammatical, functions of MMs historically relate to non-oppositional, i.e. lexical ones. The mainstream view on the development of MMs maintains that there is a unidirectional path from

oppositional to non-oppositional functions, with reflexive markers constituting one of the more frequent source constructions of MMs (cf. Kemmer 1993, König & Siemund 2000, Heine & Kuteva 2002, Haspelmath 2003, Kaufmann 2007). However, the reverse scenario, i.e. MMs that start from a lexical distribution and only later develop oppositional functions, including the reflexive, has been proposed for a few cases (cf. Dom *et al.* 2016 on Bantu, Luraghi *forthc.* and Inglese *forthc.* on Hittite and Proto-Indo-European).

These and many other findings call for a rethinking of the diachronic typology of the middle voice domain, in order to explore the full range of possible sources and mechanisms of language change that may lead to the emergence of MVSs, and to understand the extent to which the synchronic variation that one observes among MVSs cross-linguistically is determined by the history of these systems in the first place.

The aim of the workshop is to bring together scholars working on the middle voice and related phenomena in a typological and diachronic perspective in (1) languages (language families) with well-documented history (e.g. Semitic, Indo-European) and (2) languages for which less historical evidence is available, but which can still provide us with some valuable data on the basis of comparative evidence (e.g. Bantu, Oceanic). We welcome abstracts dealing both with language-specific middle voice systems as well as those dealing with more general typological questions or relevant implications for the theory of language change.

We welcome contributions that address the following **TOPICS** (the list is not exhaustive):

- documentation of previously undescribed MVSs, especially in language families other than the ones represented in Kemmer (1993);
- the possible inventory of situation types associated with MMs cross-linguistically, with a focus on non-oppositional middles;
- the development of individual MMs, either in individual languages or in language families, with a focus on the historical relationship between oppositional and non-oppositional functions;
- corpus studies on the historical development and spread of MMs in specific languages;
- the synchronic and diachronic relationship between MMs and competing constructions (e.g. dedicated markers for oppositional functions, such as reflexive or passive markers) in individual languages;
- the role of phylogenetic vs. areal biases in the development of MVSs;
- comparative studies on the reconstruction of the original function of MMs;
- possible sources and processes of language change that may give rise to MMs;
- the role and interplay of grammaticalization and lexicalization processes in the emergence of MVSs;
- synchronic vs. diachronic explanations of the configuration of MVSs in individual languages;

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