

Bridging contexts in semantic change

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Extensional constructs in language change

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1. Introduction

- *Usage events* (Langacker 1987) or *constructs* (Kay & Fillmore 1999) = 'tangible' manifestations of verbal behavior
- Basis for *constructions* = mentally entrenched and socially conventionalized representations
- Innovations appear in constructs produced by individual language users
- Eventually adopted by other language users

1. Introduction

- Building on ideas in Evans & Wilkins (1998), Diewald (2002), Traugott & Trousdale (2013), Barðdal & Gildea (2015), Smirnova (2015) and many others
- Distinction between three construct types (Schneider 2022, 2024):
 - Extensional constructs
 - Ambiguous constructs
 - Adaptive constructs
- Constructs present in historical corpora
- Each of them characterizes a stage in language change
- Focus on the first type

1. Introduction

- Distinction between a word or sequence of words and its usage environment (Schneider 2024):
 - *Meroconstruct, meroconstruction*: word or sequence of words appearing in a specific usage environment
 - *Holoconstruct, holoconstruction*: usage environment itself

1. Introduction

- Data:
 - Historical corpora
 - French, Italian, Romanian, Spanish
- Aim:
 - Show semantic-pragmatic extension
 - Discuss the concept of 'bridging context'

2. Construct types

- Extensional construct:
 - Tentatively employed word or sequence of words
 - Occurs in an unusual and slightly modified holoconstruct
 - Temporary mismatch/incompatibility between meroconstruct and holoconstruct
 - Minor violation of conversational maxims
 - Joint tacit negotiation between speaker and hearer
 - Conversational implicature/invited inference (Geis & Zwicky 1971; Levinson 1983; Traugott & Dasher 2002)
 - Mismatch/incompatibility easily resolved
 - Slightly adapted/modified meaning of the meroconstruct
 - Accepted by hearer

2. Construct types

- An extensional construct is innovative, but not completely new
- Unusual association/combination of existing constructions
- Modified meroconstruct and holoconstruct are not conventionalized
- *Bridging context* (Evans & Wilkins 1998), *untypical context* (Diewald 2002), *host-class expansion* (Himmelman 2004): extensional holoconstruct
- *Coercion* (Goldberg 1995; Michaelis 2004; Leclercq 2024): meroconstruct 'coerced' into adapting to the holoconstruct

2. Construct types

- Ambiguous construct:
 - Conventionalization of modified meroconstruct and holoconstruct
 - New meroconstruction and holoconstruction
 - Potential polysemy
- Adaptive construct:
 - Gradual adaptation of the meroconstruct's expression
 - Gradual adaptation of the holoconstruct

3. Fr. *imaginer*, It. *immaginare*, Sp. *imaginar*

- Medieval borrowings from Latin *imaginari* (*imāginārī*) and/or *imaginare* (*imāgināre*) (Corominas & Pascual 1980-1991; Cortelazzo & Zolli 1999; *DEAF*; *FEW*; *GDLI*)
- First appearance in the 13th century (Schneider 2022)
- Initially semantically related to the corresponding nouns Fr. *image*, It. *immagine* and Sp. *imagen*
- Prevailing meaning is 'form a picture'
- Mental picture (1 and 2) or, more rarely, physical picture (3)
- The physical picture sense is abandoned in the following centuries

3. Fr. *imaginer*, It. *immaginare*, Sp. *imaginar*

- (1) Spanish, 1275, Alfonso X, *General Estoria. Primera parte, CDH*
como si alguno imaginasse cuerpo de omne
'as if someone imagined the body of a man'
- (2) Italian, 1292/1293, Dante Alighieri, *Vita nuova, TLIO*
sì tosto com'io *imagino* la sua mirabile bellezza, sì tosto mi
giugne uno desiderio di vederla
'as soon as I imagine her wonderful beauty I feel a desire
to see her'
- (3) French, 1400, *Ysaÿe le Triste, Frantext*
avoit cellui sur son heaume ymaginé le Dieu d'Amors
'he had depicted the god of love on his helmet'

3. Fr. *imaginer*, It. *immaginare*, Sp. *imaginar*

- 14th century: occurrence of cognitive meanings that background or even efface the mental picture
- Metonymical shift:
 - Contents of mental picture in the background
 - Origin, constitution and reality of mental picture in the foreground
- Considerable variation: 'bear in mind', 'conclude', 'consider', 'devise', 'invent', 'know', 'machinate', 'plan', 'ponder', 'realize', 'reason', 'reflect', 'suppose', 'understand'
- Initially, none of these meanings predominates

3. Fr. *imaginer*, It. *immaginare*, Sp. *imaginar*

- 'Bear in mind', 'consider':

(4) Italian, 1292, Bono Giamboni, *Il Trattato di Virtù e di Vizi*,
TLIO

immagina bene il fatto c'hai tra le mani

'bear well in mind the fact that you have in your hands'

- 'Machinate', 'plan':

(5) Spanish, 1350, *Traducción de la Historia de Jerusalem*
abreviada de Jacobo de Vitriaco, *CDH*

imaginar algunas cosas contra personas baxas

'to machinate some things against low persons'

3. Fr. *imaginer*, It. *immaginare*, Sp. *imaginar*

- 'Ponder', 'reflect':

(6) French, 1372, Jean Froissart, *La Prison amoureuse*,
Frantext

Sus le quel livre j'ai moult ymaginé a li donner nom
agreable et raisonnable

'on this book I have pondered a lot to give it a fitting and
reasonable name'

3. Fr. *imaginer*, It. *immaginare*, Sp. *imaginar*

- 'Ponder', 'reflect':

(7) Spanish, 1385, Juan Fernández de Heredia, *Gran crónica de España, CDH*

el rey çirus depues quel huuo fecho el sacrament. si se ymagino mucho aloque auia prometido fazer

'King Cyrus, after he had taken the oath, pondered a lot about what he had promised to do'

3. Fr. *imaginer*, It. *immaginare*, Sp. *imaginar*

- 'Know', 'realize', 'understand':
- (8) Italian, 2nd half of 14th century, Franco Sacchetti, // *Trecentonovelle*, TLIO
Udendo questo il signore, immaginò troppo bene che costui non fosse l'abate
'hearing this, the gentleman realized very well that this was not the abbot'

3. Fr. *imaginer*, It. *immaginare*, Sp. *imaginar*

- 'Conclude', 'reason':

(9) French, 1390, Jean Froissart, *Chroniques. Troisième livre*,
Frantext

pensa sus ung petit et ymagina que il ne sejourneroit pas
là longuement

'he thought about it a moment and concluded that he
would not stay there for long'

3. Fr. *imaginer*, It. *immaginare*, Sp. *imaginar*

- Gradually, the 'suppose' meaning begins to stand out from the other cognitive meanings without picture aspect
- From the 16th century onwards, the 'suppose' meaning is well established and conventionalized:

(10) French, 1508, Nicolas de la Chesnaye, *La Condamnation de Banquet*, *Frantext*

/Je ymagine qu'on nous fera/Quelque grace ou quelque douceur./

'I suppose that they will do us some favor or some kindness'

- The 'form a picture' meaning continues to be present

3. Fr. *imaginer*, It. *immaginare*, Sp. *imaginar*

- Extensional constructs with different cognitive meanings do not appear out of the blue in the 14th century
 - Probably based on comparison with other constructions
 - Analogical extension, *supporting constructions* (Abbot-Smith & Behrens 2006; De Smet & Fischer 2017)
 - Fr. *penser*:
- (11) French, 1377, Guillaume de Machaut, *Les balades notées*,
Frantext
/Qu'il ymagine et pense au grief tourment/Que sa dame li
fait sentir et traire/
'that he imagines and thinks of the grievous torment that
his lady makes him feel and endure'

3. Fr. *imaginer*, It. *immaginare*, Sp. *imaginar*

- It. *pensare*:

(12) Italian, 1st half of 14th century, *La Tavola Ritonda o l'Istoria di Tristano*, TLIO

e pensando e 'maginando nelle sue bellezze, sìe innamorò tanto coralmente

'and thinking and imagining about her beauties he fell so completely in love'

3. Fr. *imaginer*, It. *immaginare*, Sp. *imaginar*

- Sp. *pensar*:

(13) Spanish, 1385, Juan Fernández de Heredia, *Gran crónica de España, CDH*

Et aquestas cosas tractadas el mauro luengament pensso & ymagino sobre aquesto.

'and after these matters were discussed, the Moor thought and imagined long about this'

4. Rom. *părea*

- Infinitive: (*a*) *părea*
- From Latin *parere* (*pārēre*) (Tiktin, Miron & Lüder 2001 [1903-1925]; Pușcariu 1905; Candrea & Densusianu 2006; Ciorănescu 2007; Vinereanu 2009; *DLR*)
- Pertains to the inherited lexicon derived from Latin
- Already documented in the first texts from the 16th century
- Not a loanword introduced in the 17th century or later
- Meaning is 'seem'
- Meaning 'appear' is expressed by *apărea* introduced in the 19th century

4. Rom. *părea*

- Sometimes used with a reflexive: *mi se pare* 'it seems to me'
- Copula verb:
 - *Îmi pare bine* 'it seems good to me, I am pleased, I like'
 - *Îmi pare rău* 'it seems bad to me, I regret, I repent'

4. Rom. *părea*

- 16th century: manner clause with *cumu* or *cum*
 - Indicates the quality, mode or way of an entity or state of affairs
 - Scope typically limited to phrases
 - *Îmbla* 'walk':
- (14) Romanian, 1566, Coresi, *Lucrul apostolesc*, CDLR
Eu îndemn voi, eu, legatul în Domnul, ca să îmblați cumu
se dostoiaște chemătorei voastre
'I urge you, I, bound in the Lord, that you walk as deserves
your calling'

4. Rom. *părea*

- *Părea*:

- (15) Romanian, 1581, *Pravila ritorului Lucaci, CDLR*
toți alalți pre rînd, nu după cum simt, cumu le-au părut
celora mai de demult, ce e după cine cumuși au fost
semenție
'all others in turn, not how they feel, how they seemed to
those long ago, but after whom and how has been the
lineage'

4. Rom. *părea*

- Syndetic sentence-adverbial clauses with *cumu* or *cum*
- Scope extended to speaker commitment
- Extensional constructs
- Pană Dindelegan (2016: 501): "metadiscursive manner clause"
- Indicate the likelihood or plausibility of a state of affairs
- Procedural/pragmatic meaning:

(16) Romanian, 1581, Coresi, *Evanghelie cu învățătură*, CDLR
puțini sînt, cum mi se pare, a o săvîrși astăzi această
porîncă
'there are few, as it seems to me, to fulfill this
commandment today'

4. Rom. *părea*

- Considerable variation
- Reflexive, non-reflexive:

(17) Romanian, 1583, *Codicele Voronețean*, *CDLR*
Cu Silioanu voao, credinciosul fratele, cumu-mi pare, întru
puținelu scrișu
'by Silas to you, faithful brother, as it seems to me, in little I
wrote'

4. Rom. *părea*

- Different experiencers: first person, third person:
- (18) Romanian, 1648, *Noul Testament, CDLR*
omul păcătos să îndereaptă din fapte bune și nu numai de credință, cum li să pare unora
'the sinful man is made righteous by good deeds and not only by faith, as it seems to some'
- (19) Romanian, ~ 1725, Grigore Ureche, *Letopisețul Țării Moldovei, CDLR*
țara nu iaste fără cap, cumu-i pare lui.
'the country is not without leader, as it seems to him'

4. Rom. *părea*

-- Different conjunctions: *cumu*, *cum*, *precum*:

(20) Romanian, 1703, *Sindipa*, *CDLR*

iar precum îm pare îm va ceare bani sau galbini, sau
mărgăritari

'and, as it seems to me, he will ask me for money or gold
or pearls'

4. Rom. *părea*

- Possible models or *supporting constructions*
- Sentence-adverbial clauses with other verbs:

(21) Romanian, 1592-1604, *Floarea darurilor*, CDLR
Jalea easte răutatea bucuriei, cum grăiaște și Macropie
'sorrow is the negative of joy, as says Macrobio too'

4. Rom. *părea*

- Syndetic sentence-adverbial clause with *cumu* or *cum* disappears almost completely in the 19th and 20th centuries
- Place taken by asyndetic *parcă* (← *pare că* 'it seems that') 'apparently, seemingly':

(22) Romanian, 1861, Barasch, *Manualul de botanică silvică*
lemnul cercurilor lemnos este roșior și parcă cu niște
flăcări, *CDLR*
'the wood of the wooden circles is reddish and, apparently,
with some flames'

5. Discussion and conclusion

- Fr. *imaginer*, It. *immaginare*, Sp. *imaginar*:
 - One of the extensional construct types occurring in the 14th century still present today
 - 'Successful' extensional construct type
- Rom. *părea*:
 - Extensional construct type occurring in the 16th - 18th centuries not anymore in use
 - Detachment 'survived' as property (cf. *parcă*)
- 'Success' depends on time range taken into account
- Extensional constructs occur in bridging contexts
- *Bridging* is problematic
- Often bridges to nowhere

5. Discussion and conclusion

- Evans & Wilkins (1998: 5) on bridging contexts:
"this phase of polysemy [...] is typically preceded by a phase where meaning B is only contextually implicated but not yet lexicalized as a distinct sense [...] meaning B often comes into existence because a regularly occurring context supports an inference-driven contextual enrichment of A to B. In these contexts, which we term *bridging contexts*, speech participants do not detect any problem of different assignments of meaning to the form because both speaker and addressee interpretations of the utterance in context are effectively, functionally equivalent"

5. Discussion and conclusion

- Sometimes associated with ambiguity:
- Heine (2002: 84): "an interpretation in terms of the source meaning cannot be ruled out"
- Denison (2017: 294): "a mismatch between SP/W's and AD/R's interpretation in a so-called *bridging context*"
- Favaro (2023: 50): "contexts where both meanings can (hypothetically) be intended"

5. Discussion and conclusion

- Ambiguity (and also reanalysis) not necessary features of bridging contexts
- Result (but not feature) of extensional constructs
- In general, ambiguity is rare in everyday language usage
- Written texts in historical corpora contain constructs that seem ambiguous, but only because modern readers lack the necessary background information

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