

The English substitutive complex prepositions and crosslinguistic constructional overlap

Abstract

Keywords: complex prepositions, Construction Grammar, language contact.

Introduction

This paper will study the influence of French on the emergence and development of substitutive complex prepositions (henceforth CPs). As they are attested in many European languages (Hüning 2014: 433), many CPs crosslinguistically show degrees of identity in terms of form and/or meaning. Cases in point are the English substitutive CPs *in place of* and *in lieu of*, which derived from the French *à la place de* and *au lieu de*, respectively, and which will serve as a case study in the present paper. CPs will be conceptualized as constructions as defined in the Construction Grammar framework, in keeping with Fagard's view (2009: 98) that CPs lie on the lexicon-syntax continuum.

Data and method

Previous work on substitutive CPs has mainly focused on the grammaticalization and pragmatic development of the constructions (Schwenter & Traugott 1995, Hoffmann 2004, 2005), even though Schwenter and Traugott (1995: 252, 258) are explicit as to the French origin of the constructions. The approach taken up in previous work will be wrapped up in a contact-induced interpretation.

As a first step to determining constructional overlap (Wasserscheidt 2014) between the English and French CPs, the in-depth qualitative analysis of Bechet (2014) will serve as a basis to trace back the grammatical development of the constructions within the two languages.

As a second step, on the basis of exhaustive diachronic corpus data from CLMET3.0 and 19th and 20th century texts from the Project Gutenberg, distinctive collexeme analysis will be used to (i) determine whether there is semantic overlap between the English and French constructions and (ii) rule out possible analogical development with the CP *instead of*. The variable chosen to run the distinctive collexeme analysis is the verb that triggers the substitution in the construction (e.g., the verb of substitution *substitute*).

Expected results

If French has exerted continuous influence on the development of the English substitutive CPs, it should appear in the constructional preference for certain verbs in English and which would appear as preferred collexemes in French too. However, it appears that *instead of*, *in place of* and *in lieu of*, when used as CPs (and not as subordinators), can be used interchangeably. A first distinctive collexeme analysis should shed light on semantic differences among these three CPs in preparation for a cross-linguistic comparison of the results.

Sources

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