

A constructional approach to the lexicalization of synsets in African WordNet: The case of possessive constructs

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Constructional grammar provides a platform for a unified justification of grammaticalization and lexicalization of words in a language. This includes the account of linguistic changes which have commonalities and features that keep those changes dissimilar. Lexicalization in this paper should be understood within the context of the diachronic process of language change. This paper unpacks the problems that are inherent in theories of language structure which assert on a sharp dichotomy between the lexicon and the syntax as observed in the possessive constructions in African Wordnet. This argument is raised in this paper against the backdrop of the linguistic theories that have progressed in demonstrating human language ability and the lexicon that has become fundamental to those theories. A major part of this paper is devoted to the discussion of the evolution of the possessive compounds in the history of Siswati as one of the languages covered by the African Wordnet project. This is based on the premise that the lexicon must interface with the conceptual system. However, there is not much agreement on which information must be included on which side of the lexical-conceptual boundary and how the conceptual information should be represented.

This paper is concerned with aspects of lexicalization in the history of Siswati (one of the South African languages explored in the African Wordnet) from the perspective of Construction Grammar (CxnG). In this paper, I show how constructional approaches can account for both grammaticalization and lexicalization within a unified framework, basing my argument around the two kinds of input to lexicalization which Brinton & Traugott (2005: 96) identify: syntactic constructions and word formation patterns. Lexicalization is discussed in this paper to indicate paradigmatic relation among words and not just a semantic relation. So, lexical relations discussed in this paper will include phonetic relations, morphological relations and morpho-syntactic relations. Again, a caveat is in order. In this paper, I consider how the CxnG framework can explain the development of form-meaning mismatches, conventionalization, and the loss of internal constituency, in lexicalization. The Siswati data indicate that a constructional approach can account for the two stages of lexicalization in a way that is parallel to the two stages of grammaticalization.