

The paradigm as a dynamic category: Overcoming the boundary between morphological and grammatical paradigms

Rafael Soto Setzke

The notion of paradigm has played an important role in society for centuries. Perhaps its most familiar use is in language education where teachers often approach the teaching of inflectional forms in languages with rich morphology by having their students learn inflectional paradigms by heart. It is therefore quite surprising that they have mostly been disregarded when it comes to usage-based approaches like Construction Grammar. Recently however, more and more researchers have started to advocate for the (re-)introduction of paradigms into usage-based frameworks to be able to account for certain phenomena in language that would be hard to explain otherwise (Diewald 2020; Politt 2022; Audring 2022). But whilst there is agreement on which phenomena could best be explained with the notion of a paradigm, there is a lot of disagreement regarding the way in which paradigms would be mentally represented, and how they would relate to the rest of the mental lexicon.

For example, Blevins (2016: 64) defines the paradigm as a “set of grammatical words” that are related by a common morphological base or lexeme, which means that members of a paradigm are first and foremost defined by their shared morphological features and thereby excluding synonyms or otherwise grammatically related constructions with a different morphological base. Diewald & Politt (2022: 2) refer to this conception of paradigms as “morphological paradigms” and contrast this idea with the concept of “grammatical paradigms” which Diewald (2020: 277–278) claims are “hyper-construction[s] highlighting the categorical, non-gradient specifics of grammatical categories”, which thereby excludes constructions that are related morphologically but not grammatically. Therefore, the question may be asked: Is there a way that we could account for both morphological and grammatical paradigms in a constructivist framework?

In this talk, I aim at unifying both approaches by proposing that the process of paradigmization, i.e. the formation of paradigms, is based on the domain-general human capacity for categorization, meaning that paradigms are linguistic categories whose members are constructions. I further claim that, as categories, paradigms are dynamic, meaning that they are able to dynamically adapt their membership criteria to improve their “Cognitive Economy” (Rosch 1978: 28). This talk will further explore how the proposed theory could be tested empirically with methods already established for other forms of cognitive categorization. One example would be to investigate whether priming effects—as they have already been observed for non-linguistic categories (Ray 2008)—can also be observed for constructions that are related either by grammatical features or a common morphological basis. If the assumption that paradigms are categories is correct, we would expect a) that priming effects can be observed in general, and b) that priming effects between morphological and grammatical paradigms do not differ significantly.

References

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