Grammatical features in the history of pronouns: an LFG account

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Aims of research

A formal analysis of agreement mismatches in pronouns derived from nominal sources, capturing their historical development using LFG functional structures with INDEX and CONCORD, and elaborated semantic structures.

Accounting for different agreement properties

One diachronic source of second person pronouns is third person singular noun phrases, used as forms of address.

As these forms become more pronominal in function, their grammatical features and agreement properties also change.

Mismatches can arise between semantics and syntax, and within syntax.

Case study: Portuguese pronoun *você*

Original full noun phrase: *vossa mercê* 'your mercy', used as a respectful form of address to one person (also an example of 'plurification')

European Portuguese pronoun: *você*. Second person function, third person agreement (mismatch between semantics and syntax)
1. Você   tem   a   sua   opinião
   VOCÊ   have.**3SG**   DEF.FSG   **3SG**.POSS.FSG opinion.FSG
   You have your opinion

Brazilian Portuguese (BP) pronoun: *você*. Second person function, mixed third/second person agreement (less grammaticalised varieties: 2) or purely second person agreement (more grammaticalised varieties: 3)
2. Você   estava   lá,   eu   te   vi
   VOCÊ   be.**3SG**   there,   1SG.SUBJ   **2SG**.DO   see.1SG
   You were there, I saw you
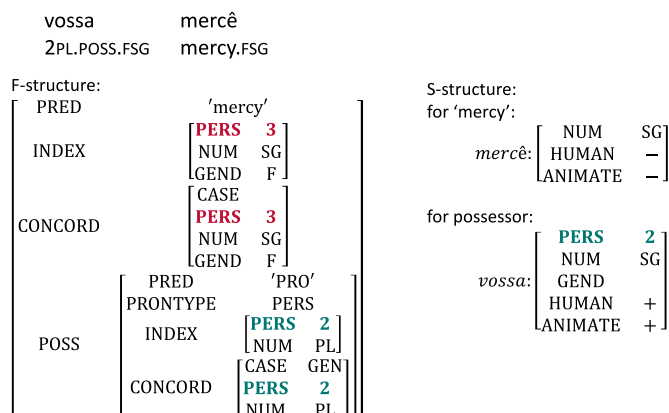3. Tenho   certeza   de que   você   vais   gostar
   Have.1SG certainty   of that   VOCÊ   go.**2SG**   like
   I am sure that you are going to like (it)   *(Corpus do Português)*

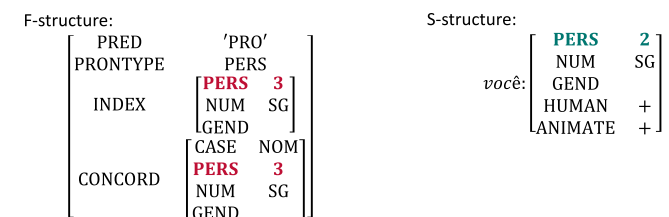| Variety	Person agreement with pronoun *você* 'you'			
	Semantic reference	Verb agreement	Possessive	Object pronoun
European Portuguese	2	3	3	3
BP: less grammaticalised	2	3	2	2
BP: more grammaticalised	2	2	2	2

LFG analysis

- Different modules of the grammar change independently
- Functional structure: INDEX and CONCORD are independent feature bundles accounting for the behaviour of different agreement targets
- I include PERSON as a feature in CONCORD (as well as INDEX) to account for mismatches where person is marked differently on different targets
- More elaborated semantic structures, including PERSON, NUMBER and GENDER, allow us to capture mismatches between semantics and syntax
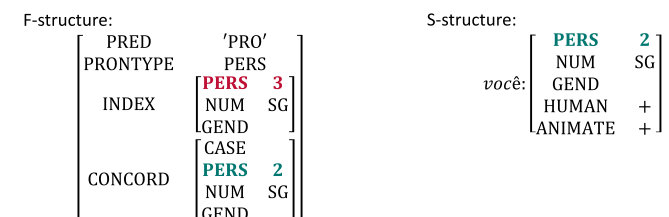
Original noun phrase: *vossa mercê* 'your mercy'

vossa   mercê
2PL.POSS.FSG   mercy.FSG

Modern pronoun: European Portuguese *você* 'you', polite singular pronoun

Modern pronoun: Brazilian Portuguese, less grammaticalised variety, *você* 'you'

Agreement hierarchy and mismatches

Corbett's agreement hierarchy: ATTRIBUTIVE ADJECTIVE > PREDICATIVE ADJECTIVE > RELATIVE PRONOUN > PERSONAL PRONOUN

Targets further right on the hierarchy are more likely to show semantic rather than syntactic agreement.

Accounts for other types of mismatch behaviour:
- English 'committee nouns': number mismatch
- Hybrid nouns: gender mismatch
- Imposters: person mismatch; normally less conventionalised or grammaticalised forms

Extending the hierarchy: in BP, verb retains syntactic agreement after direct object pronoun and possessive show semantic agreement.

Grammaticalisation of pronominal forms

The progression from full noun phrase to pronoun is gradual and has effects at multiple levels of the grammar.

Grammaticalisation: transition from *more lexical* to *more functional*

Associated changes:
- *Extension* to new linguistic contexts
- *Desemanticisation* – loss or generalisation of meaning content
- *Decategorialisation* – loss of morphosyntactic properties
- *Erosion* – loss of phonetic substance

References

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Acknowledgements

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