

***How metonymy motivates constructions –
The case of monoclausal if only constructions in English***

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The talk is an attempt to show how **constructional metonymy**, whereby a part Y of a grammatical construction X is used to access the whole construction X, leads to the emergence of new grammatical constructions (cf. Bierwiaczonek, in press). Such metonymically motivated constructions are called **dependent constructions**, as opposed to **autonomous constructions** they originally targeted. It is demonstrated that at least some of the syntactic and/or semantic properties of dependent constructions can only be explained in terms of the full autonomous constructions they have emerged from as their parts. The construction we consider in detail is the monoclausal *if only* construction. First, we illustrate the concept of constructional metonymy with the formal metonymic account of *the-Adj* constructions suggested by Bierwiaczonek (2007) and monoclausal *if*-constructions and *that*-constructions analyzed by Panther and Thornburg (2003, 2011). Then we discuss Dancygier and Sweetser's (2005) analysis of the monoclausal *if only* ... construction and show that their analysis fails to account for some of the important properties of this construction which can only be explained if we abandon the idea that there is one *if-only* construction and, instead, analyze it as a network of at least four *if-only* constructions. It is argued that at least some of the idiosyncratic properties of each of those constructions are inherited from the corresponding autonomous biclausal *if-only* constructions. These properties include their time reference and epistemic stance. For instance, the full biclausal underlined *if-only* sentence in (1) has TIME REFERENCE: FUTURE and EPISTEMIC STANCE: LIKELY, and these two properties are inherited by the monoclausal (2).

- 1) Insurance policies, wise investments, sensible diets and burglar alarms: if only we can lay down enough of them, we can maybe hold the fort against the chaos that rages outside
- 2) If only we can lay down enough of them

These properties explain the differences in the conventional illocutionary forces of different *if-only* constructions. Furthermore we argue that, contrary to Dancygier and Sweetser, the conjunction *if-only* preserves its "minimal scalar" meaning in monoclausal *if-only* sentences, as this meaning is independent of the constructions in question – it shows up also e.g. in adverbial clauses of purpose, as in (3), so it should be considered as a "mini construction" in its own right.

- 3) His work rate is so high that his players are inspired to perform if only so that the old so-and-so does not get the better of them

The proposals made in the talk are interesting because they show that the same cognitive metonymic process which is often used on the conceptual level is used on the formal level of language as well, motivating the emergence of new grammatical constructions.

References

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