

Again: On the Trajectory of Structural Visibility

Remus Gergel, University of Tübingen

I. This study offers a diachronic investigation of *again* and its changing decompositional ability to modify substructures of different predicates over time. The analysis is based on the evaluation of over 1000 adverbial instances of *again* (and variants) from the Penn-Helsinki Corpora of Historical English. The adverbs and contexts are analyzed according to semantic and syntactic criteria (cf. III, IV). Basic background is the structural ambiguity (v. Stechow 1996) between restitutive/repetitive readings. If *Lisa came back again*, then, on the restitutive reading, the result state is modified, not the entire event. (Lisa doesn't have to return twice.) Despite rich cross-linguistic literature, this structural oscillation (hence potential for variation) has received little diachronic attention. We start out from Beck et al. (2009), who observe that restitutive *again* is more frequent in 19th c. correspondence than in PDE. While a predicate like *return*, similar to *come back*, doesn't allow restitutive readings for all present-day speakers, the historical record shows several such predicates in restitutive uses. Restitutively, *return* requires the adverb to modify a non-overt result state (unlike transparent *come back*).

II. The goal here is to test (i) whether restitutive readings are on a more general declining trend (farther back chronologically and across data that are more diverse, but still consistent with one another w.r.t. corpus composition and annotation); (ii) different configurations in which the development shows correlates; (iii) the relationship of this type of development, at the syntax-semantics interface, to better-understood cases of evolution in narrow syntax. In a nutshell, we defend historically the *Visibility Hypothesis* (cf. Rapp & von Stechow 1999, Beck 2005, Beck et al. 2009 for more detailed cross-linguistic versions): (*VH-a*) There is a parametric choice in the (in)ability of *again* to decompose predicates with a non-overt result; (*VH-b*) *Again* changes gradually to the negative setting (i.e. it loses its ability to probe into more opaque predicates).

III. We focus on restitutive *again* in the PPCMBE (Late ModE), PPCEME (Early ModE), and PPCME2 (Middle English). Only cases which present clear positive evidence for a restitutive reading were categorized as restitutive. Other possibilities are repetitive but also unclear/other (under the latter, many uses of *again* are discourse-markers meaning e.g. 'in turn'). Three types of clues were used in categorizing: 1st, the predicates themselves – e.g., a predicate that does not allow change-of-state construals cannot allow restitutive readings. 2nd, world/background knowledge: e.g., if Christ is reported to *raise (up) againe*, this involves restitution to the state of being alive (not a repeated event). 3rd, the local context in the corpora frequently offers direct clues e.g. as to whether a full event had (not) been performed before.

IV. With respect to (i), we confirm a general decline in the availability of restitutive readings. (E.g., Early ModE has a much higher incidence than Late ModE. There are, however, also divergences within the epochs; e.g. the period E3 ranks relatively high within the EModE data examined so far). Two related questions motivate (ii)-(iii): Primarily, what is the underlying cause of the decline? Specifically, if it is a parametric choice such as *VH*, are there converging effects of change in separate environments related to the parameter? We are using two tests to explore this (also quantitatively). First, we probe the behavior of *again* in conjunction with verb-particle constructions and goal PPs. Both constructions are known to express result states overtly (cf. e.g. Snyder 2001) and are frequent in the historical *again* data. The prediction is that they behave similarly w.r.t. one another, but also (modulo independent factors) constantly over time (since, as overt complex predicates, they are not affected by the *VH*). The second test involves the contrastive analysis over time of predicates of lexical achievement and accomplishment (both classes do *not* express their result states overtly and are hence directly affected by the *VH*). In this second case, the predicted behavior would be a parallel but not identical development; i.e. in terms of constant rate rather than an absolutely constant one.

References:

- Beck, S. 2005. There and back again: a semantic analysis. *Journal of Semantics* 22.
- Beck, S., P. Berezovskaya, & K. Pflugfelder 2009. The use of again in 19th century English vs. PDE. *Syntax* 12.
- Kroch, A. 1989. Reflexes of grammar in patterns of language change. *Journal of Language Variation and Change* 1.
- Kroch, A., B. Santorini & L. Delfs. 2004. *The Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Early Modern English*. University of Pennsylvania.
- Kroch, A., B. Santorini & A. Diertani. 2010. *The Penn Parsed Corpus of Modern British English*. University of Pennsylvania.
- Kroch, A. & Taylor, A. 2000. *The Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Middle English*. University of Pennsylvania.
- Rapp, I. & A. von Stechow. 1999. Fast 'almost' and the visibility parameter for functional adverbs. *Journal of Semantics* 16.
- Snyder, W. 2001. On the nature of syntactic variation. *Language* 77.
- von Stechow, A. 1996. The different readings of *wieder* 'again': a structural account. *Journal of Semantics* 13.