Transitivity, valency and voice

Denis CREISSELS

This course offers a discussion of the notions that can be used to describe the way languages organize the encoding of the relationship between verbs and their arguments, and an overview of the variation and regularities observed across the world’s languages in this domain. The course is organized as follows:

The topic of the first class is Transitive coding and other verbal predicative constructions (alignment): the notion of basic transitive construction; languages with more than one basic transitive construction (direct/inverse systems, symmetric voice systems); the formal characteristics of the basic transitive construction; alignment and the Obligatory Coding Principle; transitive coding and the lexicon (bivalent verbs with an extended intransitive construction, monovalent verbs with a transitive construction).

The topic of the second class is Valency-decreasing derivations: passive; antipassive; middle (reflexive, reciprocal, autocausative, anticausative); multifunction valency-decreasing derivations.

The topic of the third class is Valency-increasing derivations: causative; applicative (semantically specialized applicatives, multifunction applicatives, non-canonical applicatives); the causative-applicative syncretism.

The topic of the fourth class is Lability and other morphologically uncoded valency alternations: lability and pseudo-lability; A-lability; P-lability (anticausative lability, passive lability); other types of morphologically uncoded valency alternations.

The topic of the fifth class is Incorporation and transitivity: incorporation as a morphological operation; argument incorporation; possessive incorporation; modifying incorporation; classificatory incorporation.

Recommended readings

1st class


2nd class


3rd class


4th class


5th class

