

After the variation comes something new!

Grammaticalisation in French Support-Verb Constructions

1 Defining Support-Verb Constructions

SUPPORT-VERB CONSTRUCTIONS (henceforth SVCs) are a type of verbal MULTI-WORD EXPRESSION (henceforth MWE), that is they are combinations of a SUPPORT VERB (henceforth SV) with a PREDICATIVE NOUN (henceforth PN), such as French *avoir raison* and *avoir peur* or German *Recht haben* and *Angst haben*. The two components of an SVC enter into a division of labour, which is less clear-cut than often assumed, in that the PN and the SV have syntactic and semantic functions, yet to differing degrees. For example, in *avoir peur*, the semantic weight is borne by the PN *peur*, which assigns (semantic) participant roles, whereas the (syntactic) argument structure depends on the SV *avoir*. However, the SV *avoir* contributes semantically, in that it determines the aspect of the MWE (here durative) as becomes especially clear when we substitute, for instance, *faire* for *avoir* (Danlos, 1992; Wittenberg, 2016; Alonso Ramos, 1998; Giry-Schneider, 2004).

While many definitions for SVCs have been proposed (Storrer, 2009; Gaatone, 2004; Laporte et al., 2008; Laporte, 2018; Schutzzeichel, 2013), the working definition of SVCs in the present paper is purposefully wide:

1. The PN fills the direct-object slot of the SV.
2. The PN is co-referential with the grammatical subject, regarding morphological encoding and contextual implicature. Alternatively, the PN is non-referential.

This allows us to explore prototypical and marginal constructions (Kamber, 2008).

2 Grammaticalisation in Support-Verb Constructions

Like other VERB PHRASES (henceforth VPs), many SVCs combine with more than one syntactic and semantic pattern. Similar to the Spanish SVCs studied by Cuervo (2010), French *avoir raison* combines with several patterns:

- (1) *avoir raison* ‘be right’ (intransitive)
(...) *et il a raison*.
- (2) *avoir raison de qqn.* ‘to defeat’ (transitive, factive (Schulz, 2003))
Le reglement de comptes politique a eu raison de la "Madame Propre du RPR".
- (3) *avoir raison de faire* ‘to be right to do sth.’ (transitive, prospective)
Certes, Michel Jeanneret a raison de mettre en garde contre les projections (...).

(Examples taken from the corpus of *Le Monde*, 1998.)

This combinatory flexibility of many VPs has been captured in the concept of verb profiles (Gross, 1984; DFG and Max-Planck Institute).

Also like other VPs, SVCs can undergo GRAMMATICALISATION (and/or LEXICALISATION), that is changes affecting their internal structure and consequently the way they integrate into the surrounding syntax and semantics. Rather than having clearly distinct subsequent stages, grammaticalisation and lexicalisation seem to be ongoing processes in French SVCs. In essence, we can view the situation as a continuum ranging from the free combination of a VP and a direct object to the completely fixed combination of an SV and a PN (forming a VP together) in the sense of Brunot (1927)’s *juxtaposés immuables*. Many SVCs can combine with several patterns, that is with more or less grammaticalised patterns, usually with differing semantics. Syntactic tests, that is syntactic transformations, help us locate structures on the aforementioned continuum (Langer and Schnorbusch, 2005; Langer, 2004; Danlos, 2009; Bouveret, 2008).

3 Syntactic change in Support-Verb Constructions

Corpus-linguistic study allows us for several French SVCs to observe patterns reflecting different stages of grammaticalisation alongside each other. Modern sociolinguistics associates change with a period of variation preceding the actual change.

This paper takes a corpus-linguistic approach to SVCs in French. The results gained from the empirical observation of the corpus are then embedded in a sociolinguistic framework. The select corpus of texts consists of 1,110,392 words from *Le Monde*, 1998. Thus, the language of the corpus is journalism as regards the genre and varies in register depending on the exact topic treated. The corpus can be accessed on www.lex Tutor.ca, which also permits the running of concordance software over the corpus. Concordances for nine select nouns were drawn from the corpus, that is *envie*, *peur*, *attention*, *confiance*, *décision*, *espoir*, *raison*, *coeur*, and *photo* (Radimský, 2011; Ulland, 1993; Mel'čuk, 1996).

The paper argues that grammaticalisation in French SVCs is an example of a syntactic change in progress with a period of variation preceding the actual change and suggests conceptualising grammaticalisation in French SVCs as a continuum on which SVCs can move up and down, diachronically speaking. Synchronically speaking, any SVC usually moves up and down on a part of this continuum.

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