

Constructionalisation and construction change. Periphrastic passive in Danish and Swedish in a diachronic perspective.

Summary

The **aim** of the project is to trace the development of the exponents of the passive voice in Danish and Swedish between 1300 and 1750.

The passive voice allows one to describe an event from the point of view of its object, sometimes omitting the agent, e.g. The application was made in the June edition of the OPUS grant (we do not know who made the application). In the languages of the world there are a number of constructions which allow us to present an event without making reference to the agent. In the Scandinavian languages Danish and Swedish there are two constructions which are classified as passives: the morphological, which involves adding -s to the verb, e.g. *Ansökan lämnades in* and periphrastic, which involves an auxiliary verb *bli* 'become' and a passive participle, e.g. *Ansökan blev inlämnad* (both sentences can be translated as 'The application was made.'). In Old Danish and Old Swedish (1250-1550) the passive voice was expressed mainly by the periphrastic construction, in which auxiliary verbs *vara* 'be' or *varda* 'become' were joined with the passive participle (e.g. *made*). At that time both languages borrowed a number of lexical items from Middle Low German, including the verb *bliven* 'remain'. With time, the meaning and use of the verb were extended and gradually it replaced *varda* as passive auxiliary. This process has so far not been well-documented. We do not know whether *bliven* was borrowed with the meaning 'become' (it does not have this meaning in Modern German), or whether its meaning changed in Danish and Swedish. We do not know why the replacement of *varda* for *bli* took place in the passive constructions, nor do we know whether the both passive constructions, morphological and periphrastic, were in competition or whether their use was different.

Research description. The objective of this project is to document this change based on a large corpus of Danish, Swedish and Low German texts from 1300-1750. The theoretical foundation of the project is Construction Grammar, which postulates that the locus of change are constructions. The research will include preparing the corpus, a list of constructions involving verbs *bli* and *varda*, a detailed description of each for each language and period and an analysis of their characteristic features. The project will also utilise statistical tools which enable identification of high and low frequency constructions in successive periods.

Expected results include a detailed overview of successive stages of replacement of *varda* by *bli* with reference to their characteristic features and factors influencing their evolution. The results may lead to our better understanding of the category of voice and its diachronic development, not only with respect to the Scandinavian languages.