

Mittwoch
08.03.2017
16:30 – 17:00
B3 2, 0.03

Does information density help? A Bayesian analysis of *help + (to) V_{inf}* in varieties of English

Natalia Levshina
Leipzig University
natalia.levshina@uni-leipzig.de

This study deals with the constructional variants *help + (to) V_{inf}*, as exemplified by the sentences (1a) and (1b):

- (1) a. Mary helped John write the letter.
b. Mary helped John to write the letter.

In many previous accounts, the choice between the variants was explained semantically. For example, the use of the bare or marked infinitive is assumed to be related to the degree of the subject's involvement in the event represented by the infinitive (Dixon 1991). In addition, such factors as cognitive complexity, avoidance of identity (*horror aequi*) and the inflectional form of *help*, have been shown to constrain the choice between the bare or marked infinitive (Lohrmann 2011). In this study, I test an alternative explanation based on the principles of economy (e.g. Haiman 1983) and Uniform Information Density (UID) (Jaeger 2010). The higher the predictability of the infinitive in a given context, the higher are the chances of the bare infinitive being used.

The analyses are based on Davies' (2013) corpus of Global Web-based English, which represents twenty countries where English is spoken. I fit Bayesian mixed-effects binomial regression models, with the type of the infinitive as the response variable, the above-mentioned contextual variables as fixed effects and the infinitives and text IDs as random intercepts.

References: • Davies, M. (2013): Corpus of Global Web-Based English: 1.9 billion words from speakers in 20 countries. • Dixon, R.M.W. (1991): A New Approach to English Grammar, on Semantic Principles. Oxford: Clarendon Press. • Jaeger, T.F. (2010): Redundancy and reduction: speakers manage syntactic information density. *Cognitive Psychology* 61: 23–62. • Haiman, J. (1983): Iconic and economic motivation. *Language* 59(4): 781–819. • Lohmann, A. (2011): Help vs. help to – a multifactorial, mixed-effects account of infinitive marker omission. *English Language and Linguistics* 15(3): 499–521.