Relativizing transitivity and voice: Reflexive and deponent constructions in Swedish
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Structures that are neither quite active nor passive, or neither quite transitive nor intransitive, are often marked morphologically. In Swedish, the typical markers are reflexives and so-called deponents. The latter are formed by an s-suffix on the verb, which is also used in passives and derives historically from the reflexive sig. Some examples are given in (1).

(1)  
   a. Kan du precisera dig?  
       (object-suppressing reflexive)  
       can you make-precise yourself  
       'Can you specify what you mean?'
       (absolute deponent)  
       Kim tease-S  
       'Kim is teasing someone/me' or 'Kim is a tease'
   c. Projektet utvecklas/utvecklar sig enligt planen.  
       (medial deponent/reflexive)  
       project-DEF develop-S/develop REFL according-to plan-DEF  
       'The project develops according to plan'

In (1a-b) the reflexive and deponent elements serve a detransitivizing function; in (c) they mark middle voice, i.e. associate a Patient role with the subject. Also in other structures they typically relativize transitivity and/or voice, although in different ways in different constructions. These markers exhibit a partially overlapping distribution; both appear in reciprocals, for instance, but there are also constructions specific to one or the other. Especially the reflexives are quite versatile with respect to their constructional distribution.

In this talk, I will present a Construction Grammar account of reflexive and deponent constructions in Swedish, based on investigation of some 400 reflexive verbs and 200 deponent verbs in a major Swedish dictionary. One might describe the general approach as a cross between Levin (1993) and Goldberg (1995). The lexical starting-point and the ambition to make a comprehensive inventory of structures resemble Levin’s work – but the theoretical and analytical perspective is constructional, not lexical, and the outcome is a set of Goldberg-style argument constructions. The analysis distinguishes around 30 reflexive and deponent constructions. Together, they cover a wide array of more or less transitive and more or less active functions.

It is striking how the analysis for the most part represents an “intermediate” level of abstraction compared to a lexical or syntactic account. The 30 constructions assumed can be compared with the 600 lexical entries they are based on, on the one hand; and the few (4-7) general categories that are proposed in grammar books, on the other. Note that this intermediate level was not an aim beforehand; on the contrary, the overall approach is essentially multigrain (cf. Sag 2007). These are simply the relevant generalizations suggested by the data. The constructions are typically semiproducitive, neither fully general nor restricted to specific verbs, and the distinguishing characteristics cannot be ascribed to a single linguistic level but consist of a combination of phrasal, lexical, and morphological features. Thus, the patterns recognized would be hard to capture from a purely lexicalist or syntactic perspective.