

## Understudied gram types and corpus linguistics: disposition for behaviour and restrictives

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Linguistics has a long tradition of focusing on grammatical phenomena, which yields the impression that grammar is already well understood. However, grams are diverse, there are minor patterns (with low text frequency) and not all grammatical phenomena easily sort into nominal, verbal and clausal standard boxes. There are probably many grammatical phenomena that are still understudied both descriptively and cross-linguistically and there is considerable risk that already well-understood gram types reflect a biased set. Understudied grams can exhibit unexpected usage patterns (Holvoet 2019; Nau 2019), which is why it may be profitable to consider them in their natural environment, in language use.

This talk consists of two case studies where understudied gram types are addressed with corpus linguistic methods, but in entirely different ways: (i) the minor gram type of disposition for behaviour is addressed in Scandinavian languages in original text corpora (Borin et al. 2012) and (i) restrictives (‘only’) are considered in a world-wide parallel corpus in translated texts.

The disposition for behaviour ('by nature') minor gram type occurs in Scandinavian languages and in Central Alaskan Yup'ik (CAY), and is so-far better described in CAY (e.g., Mithun & Ali 1996). In Scandinavian languages, it is expressed by predicative animate adjectives with the preposition 'of' and the reflexive pronoun (entirely unlike CAY, which has habitual intransitive verbs formed from emotional roots). Despite their low text frequency in the range of one to ten per million words, Scandinavian reflexive adjectives are highly productive and can be combined with several thousand adjective lexemes. (Some other European languages have much more idiomatized reflexive predicative adjectives, such as Ukrainian *harna soboju* 'beautiful ["by herself"]'; von Waldenfels 2012). Scandinavian reflexive adjectives have specific aspectual properties and they interact in interesting ways with two kinds of scales (they are often intensified). Reflexive adjectives are also of particular interest for studying the interaction between animacy and behaviour. Despite their productivity, limitation to word-scope, which is well-adapted to their generalizing meaning, provides the gram with a stereotypical flair. Scandinavian reflexive adjectives can also be considered a construction, which is illustrated for Swedish in the figure below:



In contrast, restrictives (‘only’) are omnipresent across the languages of the world and arguably universal. Despite many semantic studies especially in SAE-languages, there are few large-scale cross-linguistic investigations and even in larger languages, the use of restrictives is

still poorly understood. In a massively cross-linguistic study based on parallel texts I have investigated restrictives across a stratified sample from 121 language families and isolates in translations of the New Testament (Mayer & Cysouw 2014). Major findings are that restriction plays an important role in discourse and that the use of restrictives exhibits hemispheric differences with the Pacific and the Afro-Eurasian linguistic hemispheres reflecting partly different usage patterns. Like other kinds of particles and clitics, restrictives tend to have very high text frequency in languages of the Americas and New Guinea. Benjamin Lee Whorf, a pioneer in pointing out fundamental differences between languages of the Old and the New World, has called them “tensors”, “...a special part of speech” that “denotes only intensity, tendency, duration, and sequence” (Whorf 1939). The high text frequency of restrictives in many languages of the Pacific hemisphere seems to have formal correlates, such as morphological (bound) expression and double exponence.

### **Selected references**

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