The Avertive, Frustrative and Apprehensional category: a semantic comparison

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I compare three semantically elaborate grammatical categories (definition according to Kuteva, 2009) involving, amongst others, the inherent semantic feature of counterfactuality: First, the apprehensional which marks a possible but not yet realized event, which is unpleasant or harmful and therefore needs to be avoided (Dixon (1980)); secondly, the avertive indicating that an action nearly happened but did not in the end (Kuteva (1998)); the third category is the frustrative category which signals that the action was realised but an expected outcome failed to realise (Overall (in preparation)). All three grams mark verb situations that are in some way counter to what one might expect.

Whereas the apprehensional so far has asserted independent status as grammatical category, the transition from the avertive to the frustrative category is often fuzzy. To this day many linguistic sources either assume that the frustrative and the avertive category are only different names for a third superordinate category, the antiresultative (Ziegler (2006), Malchukov (2004)) or define the avertive semantics as subcategory of the frustrative category (Overall (in preparation). The fact that some languages, such as Tariana (Aikhenvald (2003)), feature related markers to express the avertive or the frustrative meaning strengthen the assumption that the avertive and the frustrative markers could have evolved via a similar path of grammaticalization.

I claim that the failure to delineate the two grams lies in the model of linguistic categorization employed. Malchukov as well as Aikhenvald and Overall follow Roman Jakobson´s model of linguistic categorization: they assign a core meaning, either labeled antiresultative or frustrative which, depending on contextual factors, can be extended to different ephemeral senses, e.g. the avertive. According to this definition the semantics that are expressed by the frustrative, for example, can be extended to express the meaning of the avertive. However, here it will be argued that an analysis according to Jakobson's model of "Gesamtbedeutung" (core meaning) is not appropriate since a common core meaning for two, let alone for all three categories is not applicable. Rather an analysis according to Wittgenstein's model of family resemblance will be put forward, which on the one hand acknowledges the common nodes of interrelated meaning chains of all three categories but on the other hand assigns independent status to them.

Finally, it will be briefly introduced that there is a characteristics shared by most examples featuring one of the three expressions: the implication of a certain emotional attitude towards the event marked by the category. This study suggests that the reason is rooted in the semantic feature common to all three categories: counterfactuality.

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