

# On the Universality of Auxiliary Verbs

Abstract category: (oral/poster)

Delimiting properties of auxiliary verbs vis à vis lexical verbs has been the topic of continuous debate in generative grammar. It has, as stated by Heine (1993: 26), “provided one of the most popular battlegrounds for disputes of linguistic theory.”

Although it has often been observed that there is no any specific language-independent formal definition that can be used to determine the characterization of any given element as an auxiliary verb (Anderson 2006: 5, Kuteva 2001:5, cf. Heine 1993: 70), the current paper argues that there is still room to find some universal properties that help us end up with the conclusion that auxiliaries and lexical verbs are two distinct types of syntactic entities. To this end, this paper describes carefully the characteristics necessary for what is to count as an auxiliary verb.

Having done that, the paper turns to argue that at least two universal properties must co-occur in order to distinguish the auxiliary verb from other syntactic categories. (i) Auxiliation should be understood as the development of constructions into markers of tense, agreement, modality, and perhaps aspect. (ii) Auxiliary verbs do not enter into a thematic relation with the arguments in the sentence, leaving this job to the lexical verbs that auxiliaries tend to occur separately from. This may constitute the standard syntactic argument that auxiliaries and lexical verbs are two distinct types of syntactic entities.

## Selected References

- Anderson, G. 2006. *Auxiliary Verb Constructions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.  
Heine, B. 1993. *Auxiliaries, Cognitive Forces, and Grammaticalization*. New York: Oxford University Press.  
Kuteva, T. 2001. *Auxiliation: An Enquiry into the Nature of Grammaticalization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.