

Aspects of Grammaticalization: Current Resources and Future Prospects¹

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1. Introduction

Grammaticalization, as a theoretical framework to account for linguistic changes of items advancing from a lexical to a grammatical or from a less grammatical to a more grammatical status, and at the same time as a linguistic phenomenon itself, where “linguistic elements (lexical, pragmatic, sometimes even phonetic items) change into constituents of grammar, or by which grammatical items become more grammatical in time” (Wischer 2006: 129), has caused considerable renewed interest since the 1990s, although the whole theory behind this term has a much longer tradition, dating back to historical-typological and historical comparative studies in the 19th century (see Heine, Claudi and Hünnemeyer 1991; Lehmann 1995). The term ‘grammaticalization,’ however, was only used for the first time by Antoine Meillet in 1912. In the further course of the 20th century, with structuralism and later generativism having become dominant frameworks in language studies, the interest in grammaticalization declined. This situation changed in the 1970s after Givón’s paper entitled “Historical syntax and synchronic morphology; an archaeologist’s field trip,” containing the famous slogan “today’s morphology is yesterday’s syntax” (Givón 1971: 413) had appeared. Since then a renewed interest in grammaticalization studies developed, which has constantly increased.

Since 1999, every three years an international conference has brought together scholars to exchange their theoretical ideas and practical findings about processes of grammaticalization in various languages of the world. The

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Synchronically, a linguistic item can be fully lexical or fully grammatical, thus sharing all criteria that apply for one or the other area, or it can be situated somewhere between lexicon and grammar so that only some of the criteria apply. Givón (1993/I: 48) distinguishes between lexical words and non-lexical morphemes in the following way, see Figure 2.

critterion	lexical words	non-lexical morphemes
morphemic status	free	bound
word size	large	small
stress	stressed	unstressed
meaning	complex, specific	simple, general
class size	large	small
membership	open	closed
function	code shared knowledge	grammar, word-derivation

Figure 2. Criteria to distinguish between lexical and grammatical elements (after Givón 1993/I: 48)

When seen as a diachronic process, grammaticalization is generally claimed to be unidirectional, i.e. irreversible, although alleged counterexamples have raised a lively discussion on this issue recently.

3. Historical Survey

Studies related to the concept of grammaticalization have their roots already in 18th century philosophical reflections about language and studies on the etymology of words and morphemes. So, for example, in 1746 the French philosopher Etienne Bonnot de Condillac in his *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines* claimed that the personal endings of the verb have their origin in personal pronouns (see Lehmann 1995: 1), or the English scholar John Horne Tooke in his philosophical treatise *The diversions of Purley* (1786), referring to his concept of 'abbreviations,' maintained that prepositions derive from nouns or verbs, as in the case of Old English (OE) *fram* 'from,' which is related to the OE noun *fruma* 'beginning.'

The 19th century was then the age of Historical Comparative Linguistics and — with the discovery of many new exotic languages — the beginning of typological studies. When scholars like Franz Bopp, who is also called the

“father of Indo-European (IE) studies,” or Jacob Grimm, compared the morphology of ancient IE languages to determine and prove family relationships and to reconstruct protolanguages, they necessarily had to raise the question about the origin not only of lexical but also of grammatical words and morphemes. In a study ‘*On the conjugation system of the Sanskrit language in comparison with that of the Greek, Latin, Persian and the Germanic language*’² (1816), Bopp comes to the same conclusion as Condillac that personal endings are former agglutinated personal pronouns. Wilhelm von Humboldt, rather from a typological perspective, explicitly writes ‘*About the origin of grammatical forms and their influence on the development of ideas*’ (1822). He argues that lexical words through frequent use lose in meaning and are phonologically reduced. This way they turn into grammatical words and later by agglutination into inflections.

The term ‘grammaticalization’ was then first used by the French linguist Antoine Meillet in his 1912 article *L'évolution des Formes Grammaticales*. He defined it as the “attribution du caractère grammatical à un mot jadis autonome” (‘attribution of a grammatical character to a formerly autonomous word’) and considered it as one major process of grammatical change besides analogy. The driving forces of grammaticalization are seen quite convincingly by Meillet in two opposing principles of language use: “expressivité” and “usage.”

In the first half of the 20th century reflections on grammaticalization were declining. They were mainly restricted to studies in historical linguistics during that time when linguistics had shifted its focus more on synchronic descriptive approaches due to the introduction of structuralism and later generativism. Only in the 1970s a revival of grammaticalization studies began with Givón’s (1971) article on *Historical syntax and synchronic morphology: an archaeologist’s field trip*, containing the famous slogan “today’s morphology is yesterday’s syntax.” Here Givón described the change of linguistic elements from the level of discourse through syntax and morphology to morpho-phonemics and related it to the change of combining techniques from isolating to synthetic types, as illustrated in Figure 3.

²The titles in inverted commas are my translation of the original German titles. The original titles are given in the references section.

level	Discourse	Syntax	Morphology	Morphophonemics
technique	isolating	> analytic	> synthetic- agglutinating	> synthetic- flexional
phase	syntacticization	morphologization	demorphemicization	loss
process		grammaticalization		

Figure 3. Grammaticalization cline according to Givón (1971)

In the 1980s, grammaticalization studies also underwent a revival in Germany, especially among scholars in typology projects in Cologne. In 1985, Christian Lehmann established his parameters to determine the degree of grammaticalization of a linguistic item from a synchronic perspective, whereby each of the parameters corresponds to a particular diachronic process, see Figure 4.

Paradigmatic Parameters:			
(a) integrity	↔	phonetic/semantic attrition	
(b) paradigmaticity	↔	paradigmaticization	
(c) paradigmatic variability	↔	obligatorification	
Syntagmatic Parameters:			
(d) scope	↔	condensation	
(e) bondedness	↔	coalescence	
(f) syntagmatic variability	↔	fixation	

Figure 4. Parameters of grammaticalization according to Lehmann (1985)

4. Mechanisms and Principles of Grammaticalization

From a diachronic perspective, grammaticalization is a complex process which involves a number of interrelated mechanisms: pragmatic inferencing (based on metaphorical or metonymical relationships), semantic bleaching, syntactic reanalysis, analogical extension, phonetic attrition.

These mechanisms shall be illustrated with the help of the grammaticalization of the English future marker *be going to*. In example (1), *go* is used in its original lexical sense, complemented by a prepositional phrase as obligatory

adverbial. In example (2), the particular syntactic structure forms a critical context in terms of Diewald (2002), which allows pragmatic inferencing on the basis of a metonymical relationship:

- (1) *She is going [to the policeman].*
 (2) *She is going [to ask the policeman].*

In (2) a movement in progress is intentionally directed on an action (*ask the policeman*). The future event is understood as part of the situation and interpreted as more important than the movement itself. This pragmatic inferencing is accompanied by a semantic bleaching of the lexical verb *go*. It loses its semantic feature <dynamic, move> and is thus generalized in meaning. However, this semantic generalization only affected the item *go* when it occurred in the particular construction [*be GOing to V*]. At the same time a syntactic reanalysis took place as illustrated in Figure 5:

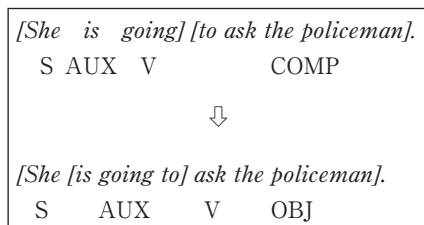


Figure 5. Syntactic Reanalysis

Since the syntactic reanalysis takes place at the deep structure, it only becomes obvious at the surface when an analogical extension to “isolating contexts” (cf. Diewald 2002) has occurred, as in examples (3) - (5):

- (3) *She is going to **receive a letter**.*
 (4) *It is going to **rain**.*
 (5) *The letter is going to **be written**.*

These examples are no longer ambiguous since the highlighted constituents are not compatible with the earlier lexical meaning of the item *go*. The event of *receiving a letter* in (3) is not an action that a movement in progress can be

intentionally directed on; *it* in (4) is not referential and can therefore not act as the agent of an intentional movement; *the letter* in (5) is inanimate and therefore not able to perform an intentional movement and additionally the passive structure does not allow an interpretation in terms of an intended goal. That means that the construction of such sentences is only possible after the reanalysis of *go* as a lexical verb to *be going to* as an auxiliary has occurred.

Once *be going to* had joined the class of auxiliaries, conveying a grammatical function instead of a specific lexical meaning, it could become subject to phonetic attrition, as is the case with most function words in English. Since this is a phenomenon of the spoken language, it is not surprising that its integration into the written standard is to a great extent impeded by conservative norms of the language. Nevertheless, even in the written language we can today find reduced forms of *be going to* like in examples (6) - (8):

(6) *She's gonna ask the policeman*

(7) *It's gonna rain.*

(8) *The letter's gonna be written.*

Besides the mechanisms involved in grammaticalization, there are certain principles of language change that have to be taken into account in studies on grammaticalization. Hopper (1991) lists the following: layering, divergence, specialization, persistence, and de-categorialization.

With respect to the development of future markers in English, the principle of layering becomes clearly obvious. *Be going to* is not the only future marker in English. It is the result of a fairly recent development compared to an older layer of future grams, namely *will* and *shall*. This means that grammaticalization does not require the loss of an older grammar. Instead, a process of renewal may set in even if there is already a grammatical marker in the same functional domain. Thus it is rather the concept of expressivity, or the usage of linguistic items in “untypical contexts” (see Diewald 2002), that marks the beginning of a grammaticalization process, than the need to replace or reconstruct a grammatical marker that has lost its function or has disappeared completely due to phonetic attrition through frequent use.

The principle of divergence can also be illustrated with the English future

marker *be going to*. What happened in Middle English is that the source lexeme *go* split into two divergent uses. The lexical item *go* has never been completely replaced by the grammatical item *be going to*. Both exist side by side, as can be seen in Modern English examples like (9) and (10).

(9) *He goes to school.*

(10) *He is going to write a test.*

In the process of grammaticalization the lexical item had just developed an additional use, just like in processes of semantic change, where linguistic items can develop an additional meaning.

Specialization is a principle of linguistic change that can also be applied to *be going to* as a future marker. In late Middle English and Early Modern English various constructions could be used variably to express near future: *be about to*, *be at the point of*, *be at the verge of*, *be going to*, etc. In Present-day English, it is *be going to* that has to a certain extent become obligatory in particular contexts to express future relevance. Specialization means that, as grammaticalization proceeds, the number of possible choices is gradually narrowed down and one specific item is specialized for this particular function and finally becomes obligatory in this respective context.

The principle of persistence has consequences for linguistic reconstructions. English *be going to* as a future marker still shows traces of its original lexical meaning <movement, dynamic>, as illustrated in example (2) above. Finally, de-categorialization is the only principle of those listed by Hopper which does not generally apply to language change, but is restricted to grammaticalization processes, although Lehmann (2002) takes a critical approach towards this view. De-categorialization refers to the change from a major category, like noun, lexical verb, adjective, to a minor one, like preposition, auxiliary, conjunction, etc. This has occurred to *go* in its grammaticalization process from lexical verb to auxiliary. A de-categorialized item has lost the typical morpho-syntactic properties of the major category it formerly belonged to and has turned into an element of a minor class, which is typically invariable in form. In this respect auxiliaries are somewhat exceptional by retaining some of the verbal morphology.

5. Current Trends in Grammaticalization Studies

Although we have observed a renewed interest in grammaticalization phenomena since the 1970s, as mentioned before, it has been especially for the last 10 years that extraordinary attention has been paid to topics related to grammaticalization and a huge controversial scholarly dispute has arisen with regard to particular aspects of this concept or to the relevance of the concept itself. Since 1999 four major international conferences (apart from smaller workshops or particular sections at other conferences) in a series *New Reflections on Grammaticalization* (NRG) have taken place: at Potsdam (1999), Amsterdam (2002), Santiago de Compostela (2005), Leuven (2008). The next one is planned for 2012 in Edinburgh.

Currently there are two major fields which the renewed interest in grammaticalization is related to. One important issue is the relevance of grammaticalization theory to general linguistic theory, and the other aspect is the application of grammaticalization theory to particular case studies. I will mainly focus on the former here and additionally elaborate on some issues that play a major role in current studies on grammaticalization.

Grammaticalization has traditionally been studied from a functionalist perspective whereby language is viewed in terms of its use. It has thus usually been conceived as a semantically/pragmatically driven process, which is mainly determined by non-linguistic cognitive faculties and may also be affected by contact factors. In the recent past, however, the phenomenon of grammaticalization has also received particular attention in formalist studies. There have been attempts at trying to include the concept of grammaticalization in the generative framework, whereby grammaticalization is treated merely as a regular case of parameter change (cf. Roberts 1993; Roberts and Roussou 2003). Pragmatic and other 'non-linguistic' factors are considered irrelevant. Therefore, compared with the traditional concept of grammaticalization, I would conclude that such an approach has no explanatory value.

Other scholars have called into question the whole general framework of grammaticalization (cf. Newmeyer 1998; Campbell 2001; Janda 2001). It was especially the status of a theory of grammaticalization that was questioned, so that grammaticalization was considered an epiphenomenon, a cover term for a combination of changes that could be explained otherwise. Campbell criticized in particular the concept of unidirectionality, which he claimed was built into

the definition of grammaticalization as a change from lexical to grammatical and from grammatical to even more grammatical. By providing a list of alleged counterexamples to the unidirectionality claim he thus attempted to deconstruct the general framework of grammaticalization. Furthermore, he tried to reduce the evolution of grammar to reanalysis and analogy, arguing that all other mechanisms are not relevant. Janda, in a similar way, claimed that transmission is discontinuous, and therefore grammaticalization is countable.

Yet such fundamental criticism did not lead to the decline of grammaticalization research, on the contrary, the reaction was a renewed interest and inquiry among scholars into the crucial issues of the scholarly debate, such as the concept of unidirectionality, including the relationship between grammaticalization and lexicalization; the relationship between language contact and grammaticalization; the role of constructions in grammaticalization; the relationship between areal typology and grammaticalization; the applicability of grammaticalization to the evolution of discourse markers, particles and other elements that do not belong to the traditional core area of grammar, to word order and other syntactic structures, or to prosodic features, tone, sound alternations, etc.

With regard to the concept of unidirectionality, there has been provided ample evidence that linguistic items indeed change from less grammatical to more grammatical and, as a rule, not the other way round. A reversal of this direction would mean that a linguistic item should be restricted in the number of contexts in which it is used, that a general, abstract meaning had to become more specific and that a linguistic item should gain in phonetic form. (See also Haspelmath 1999). Alleged counterexamples to the unidirectionality claim put forward by the critics can easily be accounted for, or may indeed be rare exceptions to the rule. Examples like *the ups and downs*, or *an ism*, where an adverb or a derivational suffix has been converted into a noun and thus shifted from a minor to a major category or from a bound morph to a free word, though exceptional as they are, had yet not been fully grammatical before their conversion into nouns, since adverbs and derivational affixes are not elements of the core area of grammar. Therefore speakers might have conscious access to them, like to any other element of the lexicon, to convert them into another word class. Such processes are much less likely with central

grammatical elements such as articles or inflectional affixes.

The English semi-modals *dare* and *need* are sometimes claimed to have been mainly used as auxiliaries in Middle English and since the 15th century have been degrammaticalized and become more lexical in Modern English (see e.g. Beth 1999; Taeymans 2004). Here it can be argued, however, that, according to the principle of divergence, both uses, the lexical as well as the auxiliary use, existed side by side all the time. Therefore, the tendency to prefer the lexical use of *dare* and *need* are not to be seen as a reversal of the grammaticalization of these verbs, but just as an incomplete grammaticalization.

Another candidate of a potential counterexample to the unidirectionality claim is the Modern English possessive marker *'s*. Here it is argued that the Modern English clitic has developed from an Old English inflection, a change from a bound morph to a less bound element, including an extension of scope, which runs counter to Lehmann's parameters of grammaticalization. But even in this case we must not forget that the Old English case system has completely broken down, so that the surviving *-es* morph could no longer be associated with a case function and was probably reanalyzed as a possessive marker in Middle English. This may be compared to a process that Lass (1990) called 'exaptation.'

The relationship between language contact and grammaticalization is a prominent topic in the research on pidgins and creoles. In a study on grammatical constructions in Sranan, Bruyn (1995, 1996) distinguishes between three different types of grammaticalization: ordinary grammaticalization, a merely internal, gradual development (e.g. the evolution of the definite article); instantaneous grammaticalization (e.g. the origin of the indefinite article); and apparent grammaticalization, which is rather a contact phenomenon, as exemplified by the origin of several prepositions. The collective volume by Baker & Syea (1996), which is based on a workshop on contact languages held in 1995, contains many other papers on that topic. The role of grammaticalization in creolization is also approached by Plag (2002). Another dimension in the relationship between language contact and grammaticalization is pursued by Heine & Kuteva (2005) with respect to internal versus contact-induced grammaticalization. An interesting aspect has been raised by Kuteva (2008), where she demonstrates how linguistic accretion may be the result of contact-induced grammaticalization.

With the emergence of construction grammar in linguistics, the role of constructions in grammaticalization has acquired crucial significance today, cf. Traugott (2003). This becomes apparent not only in new definitions of grammaticalization, as in the 2nd edition of Hopper & Traugott's (2003) handbook. They define grammaticalization as "the change whereby lexical items and constructions come in certain linguistic contexts to serve grammatical functions and, once grammaticalized, continue to develop new grammatical features." (xv). A similar definition is given by Brinton & Traugott (2005: 99): "Grammaticalization is the change whereby in certain linguistic contexts speakers use parts of a constructions with a grammatical functions. Over time the resulting grammatical item may become more grammatical by acquiring more grammatical functions and expanding its host-classes." There are also numerous case studies focusing on particular constructions and their grammaticalization, cf. for example Wischer (2008) or Brinton (2008). While Wischer (2008) has a closer look at periphrastic verb constructions and their grammaticalization in the history of English placing special emphasis on the perfect construction, Brinton (2008) concentrates on composite predicates in English. She distinguishes between (partly) grammaticalized constructions, such as *as take a look at*, *have a walk*, *give a kick*, etc., which are also called 'light verb constructions.' They are about to develop an aspectual function (limited duration) and their type and token frequency is increasing. In contrast to these grammaticalized constructions there exist also lexicalized constructions, such as *lose sight of*, *pay tribute to*, *cast doubt on*, etc. They are not as regularly formed as the former ones and have a rather idiosyncratic meaning.

A fairly recent topic is the relationship between areal typology and grammaticalization. So Bisang (2008: 15) found out that "Grammaticalization in East and mainland Southeast Asian languages is characterized by a set of properties which seem to be typical of that area." In these languages he noticed a lack of obligatory categories and a predominance of pragmatic inference, instead. Furthermore, these languages are characterized by rigid word-order patterns and there seems to be no or only limited coevolution of form and meaning (cf. also Bisang 2004). That means that semantic abstraction is not necessarily accompanied by phonetic attrition. Grammaticalized items show relative phonetic stability.

Case studies in many different languages of the world have contributed to further clarification of the notions of grammar and grammaticalization, even though there is by no means complete agreement among the various scholars on the status and the limits of grammaticalization. Nevertheless, the picture has become clearer. Definitions of grammaticalization tend to concentrate more on essential features of grammar, like Lehmann's (2005) definition: "Grammaticalization of a linguistic sign is a process in which it loses in autonomy by becoming more subject to constraints of the linguistic system." or they try to extend the agenda taking into account language types that have been less systematically studied so far, as in Frajzyngier's (2008: 64) definition: grammaticalization is "the evolutionary process whereby a language develops grammatical means to code various functional domains, whether formal, semantic or pragmatic."

6. Future Prospects

It can generally be assumed that future studies on grammaticalization will contribute to a further clarification of the notion of grammar and of grammaticalization. If we compare the current discussion on grammaticalization phenomena with the vague ideas about the evolution of grammar in the 19th century and even with the traditional notion of grammaticalization as it had been developed by Meillet and his successors, we can clearly see that our understanding of the evolution of grammar has advanced a lot. Numerous case studies on linguistic phenomena in various languages of different types have provided strong evidence that the principles and mechanisms of grammaticalization are fundamentally the same in all languages of the world. However, we should not forget that not all grammatical markers need have developed in that way. Exaptation or secretion are just two possibilities of other processes of the evolution of grammar (cf. Lindström 2004). Future studies should take that into account.

Another prominent topic in future research will be the relationship between contact-induced change and grammaticalization. The question of whether genuine grammaticalization is a merely internal process or in what respect language contact may initiate or direct particular mechanisms in the evolution of grammar has not yet sufficiently been answered. It is to be expected that studies on contemporary language variation or contact situations may provide a valuable contribution to our understanding of that problem.

With an increased availability of huge electronic databases, further case studies based on corpus analyses will be conducted to identify new details and insights into the mechanisms of grammaticalization processes.

Finally, there have been observed parallels between diachronic grammaticalization processes and those that occur in language acquisition. Givón (1979: 226-228) had already pointed out that there are differences between child and adult language that resemble a less versus a more advanced stage in the syntacticization of a language. More profound studies on that topic have been carried out e.g. by Slobin (1994, 2002) and more recently by Tomasello (2003). It is interesting to note that in this area we often find a combination of insights in first-language acquisition, grammatical construction theory, and grammaticalization theory. Such interdisciplinary approaches, combined with more precise case studies on grammatical change in various languages of the world, will lead to new ways of thinking about the notion of grammar and its evolution.

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