

Encoded secondariness: A usage-based theory of grammaticalization and grammatical status

By describing how grammatical items develop out of lexical sources, grammaticalization research has shown that an absolute distinction between lexicon and grammar cannot be maintained. In this respect grammaticalization research constitutes a challenge to mainstream generative linguistics (as acknowledged by Roberts & Rousseau 2003), especially if a unitary pathway can be established from lexicon to grammar. Accordingly, grammaticalization theorists have stressed the uniformity of the changes covered, and grammaticalization has been claimed to be a distinct kind of process.

However, in recent years such claims have themselves been challenged (cf. *Language Sciences* 23.2-3). The relevant processes typically do accompany grammaticalization changes, but not invariably, and are frequently found also with other types of change. Paradoxically, those who wish to claim that grammaticalization is a distinct type of change, therefore find themselves entangled in the self-same problem which they brought into focus in the first place: the problem of defining the distinction between lexical and grammatical elements (in order to make clear what a grammaticalization process is).

From a cognitive and functional point of view, it would therefore be desirable with a theory that establishes a non-absolute but motivated distinction between lexical and grammatical elements in language (as pointed out in Langacker (2008:6), grammar can constitute a recognizable subarea of language without therefore being viewed as autonomous). In that case, the term grammaticalization can be given a motivated definition as covering all processes that bring grammatical elements into being, and it is not a problem that processes like bleaching and phonological reduction also occur in other contexts. It would thus constitute a significant contribution to a non-reductionist cognitive-functional theory of the relationship between usage, cognition and grammar.

The present paper proposes a solution, generalizing a recent analysis of the grammaticalization of complement-taking constructions such as *I think* (“Authors” 2007). The centrepiece of the proposal is that grammaticalization and the grammar-lexicon distinction are rooted in the coding of ‘discourse prominence’: 1) linguistic elements are grammatical if they are coded as secondary in relation to some other linguistic element; 2) grammaticalization consists in the development of linguistic elements coded as having secondary status. The discourse distinction between primary and secondary goes with a cognitive distinction between foregrounding and backgrounding.

In the paper we argue, based on standard and non-standard examples, that this proposal 1) is compatible with ‘prototypical’ cases of grammaticalization, such as the rise of Romance futures from Latin *habere*, 2) can be cashed out in operational criteria, 3) allows us to answer a number of questions raised during the past decades of grammaticalization research, and 4) links up with a usage-based theory of grammatical structure as a design feature of human languages.

References

Authors 2007

Langacker, R.W. 2008. *Cognitive Grammar. A Basic Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Roberts, Ian & Anna Rousseau. 2003. *Syntactic change: a minimalist approach to grammaticalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.