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On the paradigmatic and syntagmatic formats of function words

In many definitions, or descriptions, of grammaticalization, prepositions, conjunctions, complementizers, modal or focus particles and other so-called minor parts of speech have been treated as products of grammaticalization (Heine/Kuteva 2002; Haspelmath 2004, among many others). The reason seems to be that these word classes do not have any referential function, but serve as connectives ('syncategorematic' units) on different levels of (morpho-)syntactic structure. In fact, at least prepositions and complementizers can be regarded as flagging devices which mark off syntactically (and semantically) dependent parts of constituent structure. This is similar to case endings on nouns (Haspelmath 2005), which (outside of Slavic) have supplied ample illustrations of typical grammaticalization processes.

However, it has been overlooked, or neglected, that 'function words' are words and as such should, first of all, be regarded as products of lexicalization, which subsequently can (but need not) feed grammaticalization (Lehmann 2002). Lexicalization and grammaticalization share a couple of core features. Both processes are characterized by a reduction on the syntagmatic axis; what differentiates them, in the first place, is the relation to a host class (Himmelmann 2004): Lexicalization tends towards a maximum reduction of combinability with other elements of an open class, while grammaticalization leads to the productive application of an item (morpheme, word, or construction) to a host class. Together with an increase in the combinatorial potential during grammaticalization (and its decrease in lexicalization), lexicalized units are "withdrawn from analytic access and inventorized", whereas "for a sign to be grammaticalized means for it to acquire functions in the analytic formation of more comprehensive signs" (Lehmann 2002: 1).

In my talk, I argue, first, that these basic assumptions should apply to the relation between units (or signs) of any format; otherwise we preclude the road to any consistent theory of grammaticalization that would be comprehensive, and discriminative, on the background of other types of language change (Wiemer 2014). Second, pragmatization and (inter)subjectification, if defined and applied carefully (cf. Narrog 2017 and other contributions to Van Olmen et al. 2017), are not specific to grammaticalization. The strengthening of implicatures and the concomitant widening of semantic scope of the affected units (in the vein of Traugott 1989 and subsequent work) happens all over the place in communication; it often leads to the entrenchment of new lexical items and constructions in the system of a language variety. The crucial question with regard to grammaticalization is whether, and to which extent, the new items (morphemes, words, constructions) are used productively "in the analytic formation of more comprehensive signs" (see above). This means that there is some host class whose members freely fill a slot in the constructional frame of the respective item, and that this combination remains transparent. Continuing on this line of reasoning, the proper question to be asked with respect to conjunctions, complementizers and (modal) particles is: what constitutes the host classes of these function words, or of the constructions they are part of? And how are we to define the format of the comprehensive signs with respect to which these units are claimed to grammaticalize? Obviously, this question is central for any Construction Grammar approach to grammaticalization (and to pragmatization, for that matter).

The talk consists of three parts: I start with theoretical assumptions about grammaticalization on the backdrop of a (still wanting) comprehensive theory of language change. I then try to assign a place for pragmatization in such a theory, in particular in relation to grammaticalization and lexicalization. Here I will address the relation between

clause connectives and the format of those more comprehensive signs they serve to connect. Selected examples from Slavic, Baltic and German will serve as illustrations. In conclusion, I will try to formulate general claims that might be useful in building a comprehensive theory of language change.

References

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