

Grammaticalization and word order change

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Meillet included the “syntacticization” of Latin “free” word order in Romance among his examples of grammaticalization, the change that “introduces categories that had no linguistic expression beforehand, transforms the system as a whole”. (Meillet 1958 [1912]: 133)

There is general agreement that word order change, construed as e.g. change from OV > VO, may result from and be a trigger for grammaticalization. However, word order change alone is not a case of grammaticalization, because, among other things:

- a) word order change in this sense is not unidirectional in most theories of syntax,
- b) reanalysis of word order in parametric change is “downward” whereas grammaticalization is “upward” (Roberts and Roussou 2003); downward changes “have no interface effects” with lexical items, argument structure, etc. (p. 208).

However, when construed as a change from e.g. preferred OV > preferred VO correlated with changes from information-structure based word order strategies to syntacticized subject-oriented word order, the issue looks very different, since there are interface effects with abstract grammatical categories such as Subject, Topic-Focus, and sometimes also with phonology.

I illustrate briefly two types of changes involving word order where there are interface effects, and which can be considered cases of grammaticalization, on the view of grammaticalization as a subtype of constructionalization (specifically the development of form-meaning pairings in the grammatical domain).

- A. Word order changes related to information structure. By hypothesis, information structure itself does not change, but the link to syntax may (Lehmann 2008). Los (2009) argues that syntacticization of subject and loss of V2 in English led to new strategies for creating subject, including prepositional passives, Exceptional Case Marking passives, and IT-clefts. See also Seoane (2008) for later developments. By contrast, Speyer (2004) argues that the loss of V2 led to phonological stress clash, hence the loss of object topicalization in later Middle English.
- B. Word order changes within the NP, resulting in changes in function. Leftward movement of adjectives within the NP in English is associated with change in grammatical status from descriptive adjective to post-determiner and further to quantifier function (e.g. *an open severall* [distinct] *marke* > *several open marks*, Breban 2008).

References

- Breban, Tine. 2008. Grammaticalization, subjectification, and leftward movement of adjectives of difference in the noun phrase. *Folia Linguistica* 42: 259-306.
- Lehmann, Christian. 2008. Information structure and grammaticalization. In Elena Seoane and Maria José Lopez-Couso, eds., *Theoretical and Empirical Issues in Grammaticalization*, 207-229. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Los, Bettelou. 2009. The consequences of the loss of verb-second in English: Information structure and syntax in interaction. *English Language and Linguistics* 13. 97-125.
- Meillet, Antoine. 1958. L'évolution des formes grammaticales. In Antoine Meillet, *Linguistique historique et linguistique générale*, 130-143. Paris: Champion (first published in *Scientia* 12, no. 26, 6, 1912).

- Roberts, Ian and Anna Roussou. 2003. *Syntactic Change: A Minimalist Approach to Grammaticalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Seoane, Elena. 2006. Information structure and word order change: The passive as an information-rearranging strategy in the history of English. In Ans van Kemenade and Bettelou Los, eds., *The Handbook of the History of English*, 360-391. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Speyer, Augustin. 2004. A phonological factor for the decline of topicalization in English.
<http://www.sfb441.uni-tuebingen.de/LingEvid2004/abstracts/speyer.pdf>
(Longer version published in Stephan Kepser and Marga Reis, eds. 2005. *Linguistic Evidence: Empirical, Theoretical, and Computational Perspectives*, 485-506. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.)

Required readings

- Lehmann, Christian. 2008. Information structure and grammaticalization. In Elena Seoane and Maria José Lopez-Couso, eds., *Theoretical and Empirical Issues in Grammaticalization*, 207-229. Amsterdam: Benjamins. Available at: <http://www.christianlehmann.eu/> (under side-bar Schriftverzeichnis; scroll down to year 2008)
Read sections 1-3.1, and 5 (pages 207-214, 227-8 of the printed article, pages 1-6, 16 of the on-line article); the rest is optional.
- Los, Bettelou. 2009. The consequences of the loss of verb-second in English: Information structure and syntax in interaction. *English Language and Linguistics* 13. 97-125.
Read section 1 (pages 97-99); the rest is optional.
- Speyer, Augustin. 2004. A phonological factor for the decline of topicalization in English.
<http://www.sfb441.uni-tuebingen.de/LingEvid2004/abstracts/speyer.pdf>