INTRODUCTION: FUNCTIONAL CATEGORIES, DIRECTIONALITY, AND GRADUALNESS IN SYNTACTIC CHANGE

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1. Introduction

This is an introduction to a series of articles on three issues in syntactic change, namely functional categories, directionality and gradualness. This introduction reviews the background of the issues and explains how each of the three articles relates to the three topics. The goal of the series is to provide new insights into the nature of syntactic change by discussing the role of functional categories in syntactic change and also by investigating directionality and gradualness in formal terms.

Syntactic change is often studied hand in hand with grammaticalization, which refers to the historical change of lexical items into grammatical items (Hopper and Traugott (1993)). One typical example of grammaticalization is the development of independent pronouns into clitics and then into agreement markers (Givón (1976), Fuß (2005)). Grammaticalization is often characterized as displaying two major features, unidirectionality and gradualness (Givón (1979), Fischer et al. (2004), and Traugott and Trousdale (2010)), but in fact both of these are observed in syntactic change in general (Roberts (2007: Ch. 4)). Although grammaticalization has been treated mainly in the typological and functional literature, there have been several attempts in the generative literature to capture syntactic change in formal terms. The key in these attempts is the concept of functional category. Thus, van Gelderen (1993) proposes the rise of functional categories,

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and Roberts and Roussou (2003) analyze grammaticalization as reanalysis of lexical categories as functional categories. With this background, we provide new insights into the nature of syntactic change by discussing the role of functional categories therein. We also discuss directionality and gradualness in syntactic change in formal terms.

Nishiyama’s Article (“Relabelling and Multi-directionality in the Development of Coordination”) discusses a case that is typical of grammaticalization originating from a lexical category, but the other two discuss somewhat atypical cases. Tanaka’s Article (“Agreement, Predication, and the Rise of Functional Categories in Nonfinite Clauses”) discusses the emergence of functional categories that do not have a lexical origin, and Yanagida’s Article (“Syntactic Reanalysis of Pronouns as Demonstratives: A Case of Degrammaticalization”) discusses cases of the emergence of a functional category that originates in another functional category. The data discussed are from English (Tanaka’s Article), Japanese (Yanagida’s Article), and various languages, some of which are little known (Nishiyama’s Article).

2. Functional Categories

According to Roberts and Roussou (2003), reanalysis of lexical categories as functional categories is movement-based. For example, English modal auxiliaries such as can and will used to be verbs in OE. Roberts and Roussou analyze this change as initiated by movement from V to T. The moved items later acquire the property of being merged directly in T, which induces categorial reanalysis from a lexical category V to a functional category T.

There are at least two other approaches to the historical source of functional categories. One is the rise of functional categories that do not originate as lexical categories (see van Gelderen (1993) and the articles on the topic of functional category emergence in EL 26.2: Osawa (2009), Y. Hosaka (2009) and M. Hosaka (2009)). The other is change of labels (relabelling) without recourse to movement (Whitman (2000)). The three articles in this series offer analyses along these lines.

Tanaka’s Article discusses the development of small clauses and bare infinitive complements in the history of English. It is claimed that both of these nonfinite clause types have undergone morphological erosion that eventually led to the rise of functional categories, with the theory of predication playing a crucial role in relating the two changes. This kind of syntactic change is characterized as morphology-driven.
Yanagida’s Article discusses the development of pronominal systems in Japanese, proposing that pronouns in Old Japanese developed into demonstratives. This is a change from more grammatical items to less grammatical items, a case of the reverse of grammaticalization (degrammaticalization, cf. Norde (2009)). Categorically, it is a change from D to Dem, and the analysis is proposed in terms of relabelling, with the additional effect of the loss of agreement.

Nishiyama’s Article discusses change from the comitative ‘with’ to the conjunction ‘and’ in cross-linguistic contexts. Like Yanagida’s Article, it also utilizes relabelling, but the actual implementation is slightly different. Extending the analysis of Ionin and Matushansky (2003), where comitative and coordinate structures have a common underlying structure in the post-verbal position (e V [X and/with Y]), it is claimed that the comitative-to-conjunctive change is due to relabelling of the topmost projection of the original constituent from DP to &P, a projection of the conjunction ‘and.’

3. Directionality

Chung (1977) is an early attempt to capture directionality in syntactic change. Translated in current terms, her proposal says that a change in A’ movement precedes a change in A movement/control. Lichtenberk (1991) proposes a function-based order in language change, and markedness is also claimed to play a role in the direction of change (e.g. Andersen (2001)).

Most recent generative attempts to capture the directionality of syntactic change are built on Lightfoot’s (1979, 1991, 1999) insight that grammar change is a change of parameter setting. For example, Warner (1997) proposes that the loss of verb movement in English involves several parametric changes. Roberts and Roussou (2003: 7) claim that certain parameter values tend to covary, and Baker (2001: 183) presents a similar view. Newmeyer (1998) proposes the concept of Pressure for Structure-Concept Iconicity. In a later work, Newmeyer (2005) criticizes parametric approaches to the directionality in language change.

Unlike functionally oriented grammaticalization theory, where unidirectionality is an important ingredient in grammaticalization, the above generative proposals are meant to capture the tendency for syntactic change to be unidirectional, and do not necessarily predict that it is always so. Yanagida’s and Nishiyama’s Articles discuss cases where change is counter-directional and multi-directional, respectively.

Yanagida’s Article may be among the first generative works to discuss
degrammaticalization, but degrammaticalization is a theoretical possibility, as we saw above. In that article, it is argued that Japanese pronouns developed from D to Dem, namely, from one (more grammatical) functional category to another (less grammatical) functional category.

In Nishiyama’s Article as well, no directionality of change is assumed. On the contrary, it is hypothesized in that article that the development of coordination results from several factors (syntactic, morphological and semantic), and that each of them can change independently. This property makes language change multi-directional; for example, a syntactic change can happen before a morphological change, or vice versa. This conception of language change also predicts gradualness, as discussed in the next section.

4. Gradualness

One early and still influential notion relating to the gradualness of syntactic change is actualization (Timberlake (1977), Harris and Campbell (1995) and Andersen (2001)), which says that reanalysis itself is a trigger of change and actualization completes the change. This notion was proposed in a context that is rather neutral between generative and functional approaches to syntactic change. However, the two camps have had “an uneasy relationship” in the last few decades, as characterized by van Gelderen (2004: 8) and Norde (2009: 94). Below I summarize the situation.

Since grammaticalization became a salient topic in the functional literature in the late 1980s (Traugott and Heine (1991)) and gradualness came to be highlighted as an important property of grammaticalization, the gradualness of grammaticalization has been claimed to be antithetical to generative grammar. This is because generative grammar has discreteness as its core feature. Thus, when there are two analytical possibilities for X, say A and B, X is either A or B, and there cannot be a situation where X is A and B. For example, English to is either a preposition or an infinitive marker, and not both simultaneously.

In contrast to generative grammar, functional theories often utilize a continuum as a tool of description and/or account. When typologists, many of whom are functionally oriented, investigate linguistic variation and hypothesize paths of historical development for that variation, it is gradualness, as opposed to discreteness, that is observed. This fits the concept of continuum, and has naturally led typologists/functionalists to conclude that generative grammar cannot be effective in explaining language change.
To take a simple example, it took half a millennium for English to change from OV to VO (cf. Pintzuk (2002)). The question is what generative grammar, which is concerned with innate knowledge of native speakers, can say about this gradual change. Lightfoot (1979, 1991, 1999) answers this question by saying that language changes gradually, but grammar changes abruptly. In this conception, language is a collection of various grammars of numerous individual speakers, and this is why the change looks gradual. In contrast, the grammar of each individual speaker is constant and discrete, and there is no speaker with a mixed VO and OV grammar, for example.

The above view of language change has been modified by Kroch (1989, 1994) with the notion of diglossia or grammar competition, where a speaker uses two different grammars depending on the formal level (register). In this account, there can be a speaker of English with VO grammar and OV grammar in his/her brain, and s/he switches from one grammar to another.

The most serious generative attempt that I know of to account for gradualness in syntactic change is found in Simpson and Wu (2001). Analyzing grammaticalization of the formal nominalizers in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean, they propose that various properties of the nominalizers in these languages are captured as different degrees of grammaticalization from N to D couched in terms of head movement. See also Roberts (2010) and van Gelderen (2010) for recent generative attempts to capture gradualness with recourse to features.

Tanaka’s Article discusses the gradualness of the structural change of small clauses and bare infinitive complements in English, where the structure headed by a new functional category competed with and gradually replaced the structure without it in the history of the language.

In fact, the existence of a period of English where both VO and OV or-

1 Specifically, their analysis is schematized as follows:

(i) Stage 1 \([D \Theta] \ldots [N X]\) (Korean kes, simplified)
Stage 2 \([D X] \ldots [S tX]\)
Stage 3 \([D X] \ldots [S tX] \text{ or } [D X] \ldots [S \Theta]\) (Japanese no)
Stage 4 \([D X] \ldots [S \Theta]\) (Chinese de)

In Stage 1, the nominalizer is base-generated in N and thus has only nominal features. In Stage 2, due to N-to-D movement, the nominalizer has both N and D features. In Stage 3, the nominalizer has undergone head movement from N to D, or it is base-generated in D. Therefore, it has both N and D features or has only D features. In Stage 4, the most advanced case, the nominalizer is base-generated in D and thus has only D features.
INTRODUCTION

ders are observed does not necessarily pose a problem for generative grammar, which is mainly concerned with the analysis of sentences. After all, a sentence is either VO or OV, and no sentence is both VO and OV. However, when one looks at a complicated situation, there are cases that require multiple analyses in a single sentence. Psych verbs are such cases, and the following examples in (1) through (3) are taken from Harris and Campbell (1995: 83ff).

Old English had so-called impersonal verbs as follows:

(1) þam wife þa word wel licodon
    the.Dat woman.Dat those.Nom words.Nom well liked.pl
    ‘The woman liked those words well.’ (Beowulf 639)

Here, the experiencer is in the dative case, the theme is in the nominative, and the agreement trigger is the theme. The pattern changed in Middle English as follows:

(2) þe lewende men likened him wel
    the ignorant men.Nom liked him.Obj well
    ‘The ignorant man liked him well.’ (Piers Plowman)

In (2), the experiencer is in the nominative and the theme is in the objective case, and the agreement trigger is the experiencer.

However, there is a mixed pattern where a dative experiencer or objective theme triggers agreement:

(3) a. sum men þat han suche likynge wondren what hen
    alien
    ail.pl
    ‘Some men who have such pleasure wondered what ails them.’

b. prieþ þanne first for youresilf as ye
    you.Nom.pl
    þenkiþ moost spedeful
    think.sg
    ‘Pray first for yourself as you think most beneficial.’

(The Chastising of God’s Children)

In (3a), the dative experiencer triggers agreement. In (3b), since there is no overt theme, the agreement is (third person) singular. Note that the plural nominative experiencer does not trigger agreement. Both patterns deviate from the canonical ones in (1) and (2). That is, they “mix the characteristics of the old construction with those of the new” (Harris and Campbell (1995: 85)). Thus, in a transit stage of language change, there can be sen-
sentences that allow multiple analyses. Generative grammar usually does not treat such anomalous sentences.

This kind of apparently “mixed” grammar can be handled with the hypothesis that language change consists of several independent factors, as proposed in Nishiyama’s Article. In the above case, the case frame and agreement trigger can change independently, and this is why the sentences in (3) show mixed properties regarding the change of case and agreement.

In the analysis in Nishiyama’s Article of change from the comitative to the conjunction as well, several factors can change independently. This predicts mixed grammars of several types, and concrete examples of such mixed grammars are presented.

5. Possible and Impossible Changes

Overall, the three papers in this series propose analyses that utilize and/or extend existing theories of syntactic change. A reviewer asks how the proposed (extended) theories can be constrained so as to prevent impossible changes. “Constraints,” understood as UG principles, are components of synchronic grammar. Naturally, in the case of syntactic change as well, they serve to restrict the outputs of change, on the assumption that speakers acquire grammar with the guidance of UG, and that the contents of UG remain constant through generations.

Under the movement-based theory of the emergence of functional categories, the obvious relevant constraints are those that are imposed on movement in general (e.g. the Head Movement Constraint). Thus, there cannot be a reanalysis from one category to another that is not local. On the other hand, for the expansion-based theory of the emergence of functional categories, the combination of the emerging functional category and the existing lexical category might be regulated according to the theory of Extended Projection in the sense of Grimshaw (2005). Thus, for example, no change can result in a mixture of verbal and nominal projections.2

In the relabelling theory, hierarchical (c-command) relations are preserved (cf. Whitman (2000)), but this theory imposes no constraints as to which category can change to which category. The issue is closely related to the general matter of degrammaticalization. In opposition to the unidirectional

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2 Exceptions are structures where D directly selects verbal/clausal projections, as proposed for gerunds by Abney (1987) and for relative clauses by Kayne (1994).
theory of grammaticalization, degrammaticalization obviously opens up many possibilities with respect to the directionality of syntactic change, and this is why many researchers have expressed reservations about postulating degrammaticalization. See Norde (2009) for an example of how degrammaticalization can be described in a principled way, and for an account of why it is rare.

REFERENCES


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