[Review]

Degrammaticalization


YASUAKI ISHIZAKI
Nanzan Junior College*

Keywords: degrammaticalization, grammaticalization, degrammation, deinflectionalization, debonding

1. Introduction

Grammaticalization research is in a state of chaos. Of course, this does not mean that such research has become unsuccessful or insignificant in the field of (historical) linguistics, but rather the definitions of technical terms it employs are what makes it so chaotic. It is generally acknowledged that the term “deggrammaticalization,” the title of this monograph, is defined as the opposite of the process of grammaticalization; however, there is some debate as to what kind of linguistic change should be qualified as deggrammaticalization. For example, Ramat asserts that clippings (e.g. ism in communism) and conversions (e.g. to off (verb) < off (adverb)) are instances of “lexicalization,” as opposed to grammaticalization, because they acquire concrete lexeme status with their own autonomous lexical meaning (Ramat (1992: 550)). Ramat’s assertion might only be natural since many contemporary linguistic theories, regardless of whether they are grammaticalization theories or not, often view grammar and lexicon as being at opposite poles. This view, however, gives rise to serious terminological confusion in grammaticalization studies, because it follows that lexicalization (literally, a process by which a linguistic element becomes lexical) refers to exactly the same process as deggrammaticalization, by which a linguistic element becomes less grammatical (ibid.). Furthermore, such terminological confusion may lead to a more substantial debate on the nature of deggrammaticalization. Lehmann (1995 [1982]), for example, uses the term degram-

* I would like to thank anonymous referees for their valuable comments in earlier versions of this review. Research for this review is supported in part by a Grant-in-Aid for Young Scientists (B) from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (No. 22720193).

© 2012 by the English Linguistic Society of Japan
maticalization to indicate theoretically non-existent phenomena, following the “unidirectionality hypothesis.” This hypothesis holds that the process of grammaticalization is “unidirectional” in the sense that an element becomes more and more grammatical in the course of “grammaticalization clines” and a true reversal of this process never or, at most, only sporadically occurs. Thus, for scholars who regard this hypothesis as an absolute principle, degrammaticalization is, as the author ironically remarks, “the ugly duckling of grammaticalization studies” (p. 1).

With these definitional and theoretical controversies in mind, the book under review has two aims: (i) to explore the unidirectionality hypothesis, which is generally equipped with grammaticalization phenomena, and (ii) to define and classify degrammaticalization. To achieve these aims, the book is organized as follows: the first three chapters offer theoretical discussions on (de)grammaticalization, and, on the basis of the observations provided therein, chapters 4 through 6 each examine particular types of degrammaticalization, that is, degrammation, deinflectionalization, and debonding, respectively. Chapter 7 concludes the work and offers guidance for further research. In this review, I introduce this monograph focusing mainly on examples from English and then try to evaluate Norde’s contributions in the light of current trends in grammaticalization studies.

2. The Unidirectionality Hypothesis

The unidirectionality of grammaticalization, which is extensively discussed in Chapter 2 of this monograph, is normally scaled in terms of the ‘cline of grammaticality’ as in (1) and is generally considered as a constraint on grammatical change.

\[
(1) \quad \text{content item} > \text{grammatical word} > \text{clitic} > \text{inflectional affix}
\]

(Hopper and Traugott (2003))

Functional linguists (as opposed to formal linguists such as generative grammarians) hold different views on the unidirectionality of grammaticalization, ranging from the claim that it is a “principle” where no counterexample exists to the one that it represents directional tendencies that allow counterexamples. The author takes the latter position, adding a caution regarding what is (ir)reversible. Askedal (2008) points out that there are two kinds of reversal, namely, ‘etymological reversal’ and ‘non-etymological category
reversal. It is unlikely that etymological reversal occurs, because grammaticalization involves loss of substance and a fully grammaticalized item cannot restore its etymology, which should gradually have been lost from memory in the course of its grammaticalization. For example, it is scarcely possible for present-day speakers of English to deduce the original lexical word *dón* (‘do’ in Modern English) from the existent past tense suffix -*ed*. On the other hand, the author observes that (non-etymological) categorically irreversible shifts without resort to a term’s etymology in semantics and morphosyntax do happen, even if only sporadically. For example, arguing against Haspelmath (2004), Norde claims that the development of *after* in English does not follow a semantically based cline of grammaticalization in (2) because it shifts in meaning from TIME to SPACE, keeping to the definition that a metaphor is a conceptual mapping from one domain to another.

(2)  person > object > activity > space > time > quality
     (Heine, Claudi and Hünnemeyer (1991))

As to the counterexample of the unidirectionality of morphosyntactic cline, the English genitive suffix -*s* is a case in point, which will be dealt with later.

While there are examples showing reversible language changes at the semantic and morphosyntactic levels (and even phonological levels as well), it is fair to conclude that a directional ‘preference’ in grammaticalization does exist. The next question to be asked, then, is why this is so. Among the current approaches trying to explain a preference for the unidirectionality of grammaticalization, the author sees Rosenbach and Jäger’s (2008) psycholinguistic approach based on ‘priming’ as the most promising approach to explain the tendency of language change. Priming is defined as “preactivation,” whereby previous use of a certain linguistic element will affect (usually in the sense of facilitate) subsequent use of the same or a sufficiently similar element (the target). As an example, Rosenbach and Jäger (2008), citing an experiment by Boroditsky (2000), argue that the priming between SPACE and TIME are asymmetric and the preference for metaphorical mapping from SPACE to TIME is psychologically real. Rosenbach and Jäger’s approach to the directional preference in grammaticalization, or diachronic

1 Haspelmath (2004) makes a similar distinction to Askedal’s. According to Haspelmath’s terms, ‘token reversal’ and ‘type reversal’ correspond to Askedal’s ‘etymological reversal’ and ‘(non-etymological) category reversal,’ respectively.
language change in general, is in accordance with usage-based views on language change put forth by Bybee (2010), who commented as follows:

(3) In usage-based theories change occurs as language is used, and it can be implemented by means of small changes in distributional probabilities over time. There is no need to postulate massive restructuring taking place in the space of one generation.

(Bybee (2010: 114–115))

As to diachronic language change, when language users are repeatedly presented with the same prime, they may develop a preference for a certain structure and the new structure may become entrenched in their grammar. Although Rosenbach and Jäger’s observation on the directional preference in grammaticalization may raise the problem that it is not clear why priming asymmetries exist in the first place (p. 94), the author regards it as promising that directional tendencies in grammaticalization can be captured because Rosenbach and Jäger’s approach is empirically testable with present-day speakers.²

3. Three Types of Degrammaticalization

Chapters 3 through 6 are devoted to the nature and classification of degrammaticalization. To date, a number of misunderstandings have arisen about degrammaticalization phenomena. For one thing, degrammaticalization is not a process by which a linguistic element loses its grammatical meaning and function, resulting in an ‘empty morph.’ Such a process is, as Norde correctly points out, indicative of advanced grammaticalization rather than degrammaticalization. Moreover, one might argue that degrammaticalization should involve a change whereby grammaticality clines, as in (1) and (2), move from the right “all the way” to the left in a stepwise fashion. Such a change has not been proposed in any language and empirically it is inconceivable, as we saw from the example of -ed above. To avoid misunderstandings such as these, the author proposes that degrammaticalization entails a single shift from right to left on the cline of grammaticality, which she calls ‘discontinuity.’ The author also observes that ‘counterdi-

² As an anonymous referee correctly points out, while Rosenbach and Jäger’s observation on the basis of priming may capture the preference of the unidirectionality in language change, it does not seem to capture the authors’ pivotal claim that degrammaticalization moves, at most, only one step ‘leftward’ in the clines in (1) and (2), which will be discussed below.
rectionality,’ ‘infrequency,’ and ‘novelty’ should be involved in the degrammaticalization process (pp. 120–123). The third property, novelty, is worth mentioning here. Novelty refers to a condition on degrammaticalization in which less grammaticalized functions must be shown to derive from ‘more’ grammaticalized functions. Accordingly, contrary to the generally accepted view, *dare* in English cannot be qualified as an instance of degrammaticalization, since there is no evidence to show that (historically new) main verb uses arise out of (historically old) modal verb uses.³

Based on these observations, the author proposes the following generic definition that covers the three types of degrammaticalization.

(4) Degrammaticalization is a composite change whereby a gram in a specific context gains in autonomy or substance on more than one linguistic level (semantics, morphology, syntax, or phonology). (p. 120)

In (4), the term ‘composite change’ is employed because degrammaticalization, as well as grammaticalization, involves several “primitive” linguistic levels such as semantic-pragmatic, morphosyntactic, and phonological levels (p. 36). To measure the degree of (de)grammaticalization, the author adopts six ‘parameters of grammaticalization’ and four ‘levels of observation,’ as proposed by Lehmann (1995 [1982]) and Anderson (2008), respectively. The former comprise the following parameters of (de)grammaticalization: integrity, paradigmaticity, paradigmatic variability, structural scope, bondedness, and syntagmatic variability. Anderson’s (2008) ‘levels of observation’ are briefly mentioned in this monograph by showing that grammaticalization is typically a complex of interrelated changes in content (grammation, regrammation, degrammation), content syntax (upgrading, downgrading), morphosyntax (bond weakening, bond strengthening), and expression (reduction, elaboration). The author employs Anderson’s levels of observation because they are available for classifying the three types of degrammaticalization.

Chapter 4 takes up degrammation, a type of degrammaticalization defined as follows:

³ Haspelmath (2004: 33) views the development of *dare* as retraction, which refers to a language change in which a linguistic item begins to expand in usage in the first place, keeping its original meaning, but some portion of the expanded meaning becomes obsolete or is lost as time goes by.
(5) Degrammation is a composite change whereby a function word in a specific linguistic context is reanalysed as a member of a major word class, acquiring the morphosyntactic properties which are typical of that word class, and gaining in semantic substance. (p. 135)

The term ‘degrammation’ is employed in Anderson (2006) as one of the language changes that occurs in content. Degrammation involves ‘resemanticization’ (an increase in semantic substance), which results in the shift of an element from a minor to major word class. Although the author does not give examples of English that fall under this type, she gives the development of the Pennsylvania German verb wotte ‘to wish’ from the modal welle ‘to want to’ as a genuine example of degrammation. Degrammation is, the author says, the least frequent of the three types of degrammaticalization because, in many European languages especially, major grammatical categories such as nouns and verbs are often inflected but minor categories are not, and in order for an element to undergo degrammation, it must be used in an ambiguous context where it is reanalyzed and inflectionally marked as a major category.

Chapter 5 examines the second type of degrammaticalization, namely deinflectionalization, defined as follows:

(6) Deinflectionalization is a composite change whereby an inflectional affix in a specific linguistic context gains a new function, while shifting to a less bound morpheme type. (p. 152)

Deinflectionalization is different from degrammation in that an element remains bound in the former. This means that an element that undergoes deinflectionalization does not become a member of a major category even after it undergoes degrammaticalization. An example which the author finds typical is the development of s-genitives in English (and Mainland Scandinavian). As is well known, s-genitives, which are now phrase-internal (enclitic) determiners, developed from (inflectional) affixes, but there has been some debate as to whether s-genitives in Present-day English are inflectional affixes or clitics. This issue directly concerns whether it is an instance of grammaticalization or degrammaticalization, given the cline in (2) above. Providing evidence for the clitic status of the Mainland Scandinavian counterpart, the author proposes that development of s-genitives in English is an instance of degrammaticalization as well, because in Present-day English s-genitives attach to various parts of speech including finite verbs, prepositions, and the object form of pronouns. Even though the author gives such examples, similar to degrammation, deinflectionalization is
Chapter 6 discusses the third and the most frequently attested type of degrammaticalization, debonding, which is defined as follows.

(7) Debonding is a composite change whereby a bound morpheme in a specific linguistic context becomes a free morpheme. (p. 186)

The phrase ‘in a specific linguistic context’ is particularly important here because an element that undergoes debonding is reanalyzed in the construction where it was previously used, maintaining the former function. Unlike deinflectionalization, bound morphemes become free morphemes in debonding and this is a composite change, the primitive changes of which are confined to the levels of morphology and syntax in the case of inflectional affixes and clitics. In the case of derivational affixes, however, debonding is different in that, as illustrated in -ish in English, the derivational affixes may become semantically enriched in some way when debonding occurs. Thus, the author concludes that debonding is more heterogeneous than degrammatication and deinflectionalization (p. 187).

A typical example of debonding is the development of the English infinitive marker to. As is well known, split infinitives have an interesting history in that they appeared in the thirteenth century, are not found again until the end of the eighteenth century, and then they came into frequent use from the nineteenth century onwards. Needless to say, to is an instance of grammaticalization because it developed from a preposition into an infinitive marker by at least early Middle English. However, split infinitives appeared later. In addition, Modern English to functions as a free morpheme because adverbs and negation markers can intervene between to and the infinitive. On this basis, the development of split infinitives can be analyzed as an instance of debonding involving a shift from clitic to free morpheme. Another example of debonding in English is ish, which shifts from the suffix indicating similarity (as in John is boyish) to a free morpheme (quantifier) indicating the lack of equivalence (as in That color is greenish) (p. 223). Japanese ga ‘but’ is another example of the development of debonding because it involves a shift from a connective particle (e.g. ‘although’) to a free connective, but is also an instance of grammaticalization since it gains its subjectivity in the history of Japanese. For this reason, the author concludes that ga in Japanese is a less prototypical example of this type of grammaticalization.

Chapter 7 first presents a summary of the properties of the three types of degrammaticalization from the viewpoint of Lehmann’s and Anderson’s levels of observation. It then provides suggestions for further research on
(de)grammaticalization, including determining what the motivation is for the three types of degrammaticalization.

4. Evaluation

As the author herself repeatedly points out, degrammaticalization has been seen as theoretically significant in the sense that demonstrating its non-existence would make the unidirectionality hypothesis robust. Consequently, the publication of a monograph unequivocally demonstrating the existence of degrammaticalization should have a strong impact on grammaticalization studies. In order to examine the validity of the unidirectionality hypothesis and to classify types of degrammaticalization, the author collects examples from a wide variety of languages, and Germanic languages in particular, because of her scholarly field.

From an empirical perspective, the detailed descriptions provided enable readers to better grasp the overall picture of degrammaticalization phenomena. From a theoretical point of view, the author seems to favor functional approaches to grammaticalization, since she assumes that the most promising approaches at present are priming research (a cognitive explanation of unidirectional tendencies), a construction grammar approach to (de)grammaticalization and lexicalization, and research into the role of analogy in morphosyntactic change (Fischer (2007)) (p. 238). Although the author does not believe at all that language change occurs because of an innate language faculty (universal grammar), as assumed in generative grammar, she argues in part for Newmeyer (1998) and Fischer (2008), both of whom are generative grammarians and who have been viewed as antagonists of functional-oriented grammaticalization theorists. Among the various views on (de) grammaticalization, the author takes that of construction grammar, which has become a new trend in recent (de)grammaticalization studies. Therefore, Norde’s book will contribute significantly to the development of construction grammar research.

Finally, let me mention two things which may seem trivial in regard to the overall significance of this monograph. First, as the author assumes, it is true that degrammaticalization occurs in an ambiguous context, but it seems unclear to me how degrammaticalization “gradually” proceeds. Needless to say, gradualness (in comparison with gradience, which is a synchronic phenomenon) is one of the pivotal concepts in dealing with grammaticalization phenomena. The author says, “both grammaticalization and degrammaticalization (and some forms of lexicalization too) are gradual
in the sense that they encompass a series of small steps, which may take
centuries to complete” (p. 46), but she does not make it clear how this actu-
ally works in regard to degrammaticalization. In order for her arguments to
be valid, more detailed observations on how linguistic elements undergo mi-
cro-changes in the course of degrammaticalization are required. (For recent
contributions relevant to this issue, see the papers in Traugott and Trousdale
(2010).)

Second, although it may be unavoidable that scholars define a particular
linguistic process according to their own purpose, from a purely termino-
logical point of view, this monograph could lead to further unwanted definin-
tional pandemonium in the field, as I discussed at the beginning of this book
review. For example, the term ‘lexicalization’ refers in this monograph to
something different from that used by Brinton and Traugott (2005) and we
should be cautious if we use this term in the context of historical linguistics,
and (de)grammaticalization studies in particular. At present, we cannot tell
whether the book under review will make its way through the sea of termi-
nological confusion we often come across in grammaticalization studies and
this will only become apparent by determining which analysis is the most
promising for describing and theorizing (de)grammaticalization phenomena.

REFERENCES

Change,” Grammatical Change and Linguistic Theory: The Rosendaal Papers,
ed. by Thórhallur Eythórsson, 11–44, John Benjamins, Amsterdam and Philadel-
phia.
Strained Relationship,” Grammatical Change and Language Theory: The Rosen-
dal Papers, ed. by Thórhallur Eythórsson, 45–77, John Benjamins, Amsterdam
and Philadelphia.
Boroditsky, Lera (2000) “Metaphoric Structuring: Understanding Time through Spa-
Brinton, Laurel J. and Elizabeth Closs Traugott (2005) Lexicalization and Language
Cambridge.
Fischer, Olga (2007) Morphosyntactic Change: Functional and Formal Perspectives,
Oxford University Press, Oxford.


[received July 27 2011, revised and accepted January 7 2012]

Department of English
Nanzan Junior College
18 Yamazato-cho, Showa-ku, Nagoya, Aichi 466–8673

e-mail: yishizak@nanzan-u.ac.jp