[Review]

Gradience, Gradualness and Grammaticalization


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1. Introduction

Since grammaticalization is usually understood to be a diachronic process, many studies in this subfield of linguistics have naturally been devoted to revealing diachronic gradualness of language change. On the other hand, it has also been recognized that grammaticalization theory concerns the nature of linguistic categories: A number of previous works, especially the ones based on functionalist approaches, maintain that the borderlines between categories often blur to some extent (see Klamer (2004) on the categorial underspecification of the Kambera word wàngu, for example). In this context, it is surely a good time to take stock of the most recent studies on grammaticalization focusing on gradience and gradualness.

Gradience, Gradualness and Grammaticalization is based on a workshop held in 2008 of the same topic as its title. In addition to the preface by the editors, there are 11 papers in the book. I commence this review with an overview of the preface, which serves as a platform for the other papers. Subsequently, in Section 3, I will give an overview of each of the articles, and in Section 4, gives an overall evaluation of the book.

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2. The Aims

Probably due to the great diversity of approaches adopted in *Gradience, Gradualness and Grammaticalization*, the editors posited three unifying questions given in the preface with the intention of pulling together all the articles. The contributions are expected to address at least one of the questions from a certain theoretical perspective, whether functional or formal. The first question is as follows:

Q1. How are we to understand the intersection between synchronic gradience and grammaticalization?

The term *grammaticalization* is only loosely defined as a diachronic phenomenon so that the contributors could take various approaches in their analyses. The editors also proposed restricting “gradience” to synchronic analysis and “gradualness” to diachronic analysis throughout the volume, which most of the contributors explicitly or implicitly endorse.

The second question is concerned with a synchronic distinction made by Aarts (2007) between “subsective gradience” (i.e. gradience within a category) and “intersective gradience” (i.e. gradience between two categories):

Q2. What insights does grammaticalization offer for assessing the validity of Aarts’s claims regarding synchronic gradience, specifically that there is a significant difference between subsective and intersective gradience?

As will be discussed later on, some analyses in the volume do not bear out his distinction of the two types of gradience, especially when semantics is taken into account.

The third question focuses on possible relationships between synchronic gradience and diachronic aspects of grammaticalization, which is almost ignored by Aarts.

Q3. What does the intersection between grammaticalization and synchronic gradience tell us about the hypothesis of structural gradualness, and about whether work on grammaticalization needs reanalysis and analogy/extension, or some other mechanism?

Reanalysis and analogy have often been equally mentioned in previous studies as mechanisms propelling language change. The editors, however, bring into light an asymmetry between them: Reanalysis is a mechanism only, while the term *analogy* can refer both to a mechanism and to a motivation. Another case in point here is “construction,” one other key construct which underlies some of the articles in the volume. In the editors’ view, grammaticalization is closely associated with reanalysis under the assump-
tion that it involves a syntagmatic change, while constructionalization is more agreeable with analogy and pattern establishment.

3. The Articles

The first article of the book is “Gradience, Gradualness and Grammaticalization: How Do They Intersect?” by Elizabeth Closs Traugott and Graeme Trousdale. Through readdressing the first two questions introduced in the previous section (Q1 and Q2), they point out inadequacies of Aarts’s synchronic gradience merely based on morphosyntactic distributional properties. They also, in the course of discussing the third question (Q3), mention the need to clarify what exactly the term reanalysis or analogy refer to, as was already briefly discussed in the preface. In conclusion, they propose the following points: (i) Grammaticalization is not reducible to any mechanisms such as analogy and reanalysis, (ii) morphosyntactic distribution is not the only clue to grasping a better understanding of synchronic gradience, and (iii) perusing synchronic gradience as well as grammaticalization can tell us how grammatical constructions emerge in stepwise fashion. Grammaticalization studies often represent clines as macro-schemas accommodating overarching types of change, like in main verb > auxiliary verb > clitic (for English will, for instance). However, such schematic representations are apt to obscure individual micro-changes involved there. In the authors’ view, the micro-steps correspond to diachronic gradualness, some of which “may give rise to gradient systems at any synchronic ‘slice’ in the development of a particular language” (p. 39).

The second paper is “Grammaticalization, the Clausal Hierarchy and Semantic Bleaching” by Ian Roberts. He takes a minimalist approach and proposes a feature-based account of grammaticalization. Drawing on Roberts and Roussou (2003), Roberts begins his discussion with the assumption that grammaticalization is always upward and leftward in the syntactic structure. According to Roberts and Roussou, grammaticalization involves the loss of movement attributed to a built-in preference for relatively simple representations. Movement from Y to X entails at least one feature more on X than merger of Y as X. When the primary linguistic evidence for a movement relation is not clear, then reanalysis assuming non-movement will come into play. Another important premise for Robert’s paper is Cinque’s (1999) modal hierarchy. At the top of the hierarchy lie four speaker-oriented mood categories, followed by two tenses, three modal categories, four aspectual categories, three root-modal categories, and finally a series
of aspectual categories. Combining Roberts and Roussou’s assumption and Cinque’s hierarchy, he shows that his model offers an explanatory framework for the development of modals and quantifiers. As for the semantic bleaching often observed in grammaticalization, he tentatively concludes that it may be viewed as successive micro-step changes toward a higher functional category in the hierarchy. He, however, also acknowledges the shortcomings of the probationary assumption, admitting that it is not yet clear whether this view can explain all cases of grammaticalization. Moreover, he mentions the possibility that contextual factors become crucial to interpretation as we move towards the top of the hierarchy, but leaves the question open for further research.

In the article “Grammatical Interference: Subject Marker for and the Phrasal Verb Particles out and forth,” Hendrik De Smet focuses on the development of the for...to-infinitive in English and of the phrasal verbal particles out and forth, as his subtitle explicitly states. In contrast to the traditional view, he insists that the subject marker for did not arise out of the preposition for. In his view, it started as a means of reinforcing the purposive to-infinitives in Middle English as in *i cam for to donne mines fader wille* (‘I came to do my father’s will’). Nevertheless, the preposition for did influence the development of the subject marker for in the form of “grammatical interference,” i.e. the process “whereby a grammatical element adapts its behavior to some other grammatical element to which it is related formally, semantically, collocationally, or in some other way” (p. 102). His claim is supported by statistical data showing parallels between the distributions of verbs that can be complemented by a for...to-infinitive and those of verbs that can form a kind of verb phrase by being followed by the prepositional for (e.g. *ask for*, *hope for*, *wait for*, *wish for*). The semantic and collocational changes of the particles out and forth are another case of grammatical interference. By outlining particle-internal semantic changes of the particles, De Smet reveals how these two particles come to show semantic overlap with each other in certain usages, as in *send out/forth*. The overlap allows out and forth to analogically copy each other’s distribution, and to extend further into each other’s territory. Another point of significance from his analysis is the fact that gradience can go beyond morphosyntax. For example, the subject marker for proceeded to expand its collocational distribution on the basis of its formal similarity to the preposition for. Comparably, the particle out enlarged its usage territory through its collocational—and to a degree semantic—similarity to forth. He illustrates this point by mentioning the rise of the preparational meaning of
set out, furnish out, dress out, etc. According to De Smet, the prepara-
tional interpretation arose first in verb-particle combinations with the same
lexical verbs but with the particle forth, and has then extended from forth to
out. Gradience can therefore be captured as a form of mismatch or partial
convergence between different layers of grammatical organization. He also
emphasizes the affinity between his conception of gradience and a connec-
tionist model, arguing that the model allows one symbol to activate another
when they already share a subset of grammatical features.

In the article “Category Change in English with and without Structural
Change,” David Denison points out the defects of Aarts’s (2007) distinc-
tion between subsective and intersective gradience through analyzing the
stepwise category-change from N(noun) to A(djective) of the English word
rubbish and some proper nouns. For Denison, the loss of prototypical-
ity within one category (i.e. subsective gradience) and the acquisition of an
equal number of features of another category (i.e. intersective gradience) are
not substantially different in nature. He then goes on to discuss another
example of “category change without structural change,” i.e. the change
from A(djective) to D(eterminer), and confirms his hypothesis that seman-
tics may lead syntax. It is important to notice here that throughout the
analysis, Denison shows a preference for a relatively lean syntactic structure
without empty categories or functional projections. His inclination toward a
simple syntactic structure contrasts with the predilection shown by Elly van
Geldereren (the same volume) for a more elaborate syntactic structure. The
perspectival difference between them indeed leads to a discussion on what
constitutes a “structural” change in each of their articles. In addition to
the category shifts which, in his view, lack structure change, Denison also
examines category change with structure change, such as the ongoing de-
velopment of the complex preposition on behalf of. Comparing examples
of on behalf of and those of on X’s behalf in some corpora reveals that free
alternations between the two complex expressions are becoming less likely
in Present-day English, which in turn suggests that the entrenchment of on
behalf of as a single unit is under way. Finally, he mentions the advantage
of focusing on the whole structures rather than the individual constituent
structures in handling change of the kind surveyed. In the constructional
approach, questions such as whether rubbish in a rubbish idea is N or A, or
whether behalf in on behalf of my family is a canonical noun or merely part
of a complex preposition, can be left undecided.

Elly van Gelderen’s article, “Features in Reanalysis and Grammatical-
ization,” is virtually a review of the articles in this volume by Roberts,
De Smet, and Denison. She bases her analyses on the Feature Economy Principle, assuming that it is more economical to merge in a higher position than to do so in a lower position and then move. This principle, in her view, accounts for not only the upward linguistic change advocated in Roberts’ paper, but also the acquisition of grammatical structures by children. She addresses De Smet’s assumption that the subject marker for arose not out of the prepositional usage but rather as a reinforcer of the to-infinitive, and claims in the spirit of the Feature Economy Principle that the progression from purpose preposition to purpose complementizer was a more reasonable pathway for the rise of the subject marker. She also reassesses the discussion by Denison on N to A and A to D changes. Contrary to his view, she argues that the changes can be considered structural in her minimal model in that they are clear instances of reanalysis in higher positions with feature loss.

Following this is Anette Rosenbach’s “How Synchronic Gradience Makes Sense in the Light of Language Change (and vice versa).” She inquires into Aarts’s assumptions that category membership is determined by morphosyntactic criteria and that intersective gradience is extremely rare. Her dismissal of such views stems from a diachronic analysis focusing on determiner genitives (e.g. John's father) and noun modifier constructions (e.g. the theatre ticket). While the determiner genitives typically have an identifying function, the noun modifiers usually serve to place restrictions on the denotational scope of the head noun (‘classification function’). What is more, the determiner genitives are usually referential ([+referential]) and preferably human ([+animate]) whereas the noun modifiers are not referential ([−referential]) and typically inanimate ([−animate]). What should be noticed here is that we also have less prototypical constructions such as the chair’s frame and a [visitor’s chair]. It thus appears that gradience lies in the unusual constructions with non-prototypical sets of semantic, but not morphosyntactic, features inherited from both the genitives and the noun modifiers: There would be no gradience here in terms of Aarts’s criteria, for the hybrid constructions show no morphosyntactic in-betweeness. To elucidate the motivations resulting in intersective gradience between genitive constructions and noun modifiers, Rosenbach explores the diachronic development of human proper noun modifiers (e.g. the cheerful Obama supporters), which have the semantic features of determiners but the morphosyntax of typical classifiers. Her survey shows how synchronic gradience among the proper noun modifier constructions is related to diachronic gradualness with which the semantic functions of noun modifiers expand along the animacy scale.
via analogy to some bridging constructions. The cross-linguistic data which she briefly touches on also shows that intersective gradience is by no means rare, contra Aarts’s claim.

In the article, “What Can Synchronic Gradience Tell Us about Reanalysis?: Verb-First Conditionals in Written German and Swedish,” Martin Hilpert compares two possible scenarios for the evolution of verb-first conditional structures (e.g. Had he known this, he would have cancelled the trip) in German and Swedish by evaluating the predictions derivable from each account. A dialogical account, one of the two verisimilar scenarios, is built on the assumption that conditional constructions and questions share the semantic features of non-factuality and possibility. In this light, it seems reasonable to postulate that these conditionals develop from questions via the reanalysis of a polar question as a protasis. Harris and Campbell (1995), on the other hand, propose an analogical account for the rise of conditionals. Their account is based on the assumption that it is “non-assertiveness” that pragmatically characterizes many types of dependent clauses including questions and conditionals. The shared semantic trait can in turn be assumed to pave a path that analogizes questions to protases of the verb-first conditionals. In order to decide which account is plausible, Hilpert, with the aid of German and Swedish synchronic corpora, examines the text frequency of the verb-first conditionals themselves, and the relative frequency of: linking elements between a protasis and an apodosis; first person singular subjects; and counterfactuals. He also investigated the relative degree of collocational overlap between questions and conditionals, and the possibility of subordinate-clause displacement. The text frequency comparison and the three relative frequency comparisons agree with the predictions from the dialogical account. The other two, however, are more congenial to the analogical approach. He attributes the statistical results incompatible with the dialogical approach to genre and modality, and at the same time dismisses neither the analogical account nor a third alternative scenario, viz. a two-juxtaposed-declarative account, as possible evolution paths. He concludes his paper with the remark that quantitative information from modern corpora is useful, even though constructions may not behave uniformly in terms of certain measures.

In the article “A Paradigmatic Approach to Language and Language Change,” Lene Schøsler embraces the idea of “construction paradigms” in analyzing some grammaticalization processes in French and Danish. After showing how her approach can shed insight on Rosenbach’s data, she proceeds to define paradigms as packages of content and expression, claiming
that the traditional concept of “paradigm” should be extended to encompass not only morphological levels of linguistic phenomena but also constructional dimensions. As an example where what might appear as a simple lexical analogical process should be analyzed in terms of paradigmatic opposition, she cites the integration of the newly coined verb *brainstorm* (‘to have a brainstorm’) into the construction paradigm in Danish. The new Danish verb is found both in the prepositional construction and the direct object construction. Just like many other Danish verbs that can be used in these two ways, the change of construction type means the change of telicity. She thus shows that analyzing the structure of grammar in terms of a paradigmatic opposition offers a better understanding of language change than stubbornly sticking to the level of an individual lexical verb.

Amanda L. Patten’s paper on “Grammaticalization and the *It*-cleft Construction” explores how non-prototypical *it*-clefts came into being in English. The term *non-prototypical* *it*-cleft(s) refers to (i) non-NP focus *it*-clefts exemplified in (1a) and (ii) informative-presupposition (IP) *it*-clefts where the relative clause holds seeming discourse-new information as in (1b):

(1) a. It’s **in December** that she’s coming. [non-NP focus *it*-cleft]
   b. (Start of lecture) 

   It was Cicero who once said, ‘Laws are silent at times of war.’ [IP *it*-cleft]

The prototypical *it*-cleft in the Present-day English, on the other hand, represents a type of the *it*-clefts in which an NP focus is followed by a relative clause expressing discourse-old presupposition, as in:

(2) A: Is he the murderer?
   B: No. It was the therapist that killed her. [NP-focus *it*-cleft]

Patten starts her analysis by expressing her discontent with previous work viewing the emergence of non-prototypical *it*-clefts as an extension from impersonal constructions in Middle English. With scrutiny of statistical data based on the Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus, she reveals discontinuity between the impersonal construction and the non-NP focus *it*-cleft in terms of structure, function, and frequency. Alternatively, she proposes a direct path from the existing prototypical NP-focus *it*-cleft to the non-prototypical subtype as a much more straightforward and plausible development. She also provides evidence that coercion made it possible for the IP *it*-cleft to evolve as a derivative from the prototypical *it*-cleft. Coercion plays an essential role as well in the process whereby the *it*-cleft construction came to permit a non-NP item into the post-copular slot. Thus, the development of the *it*-cleft represents a case of gradual constructional emergence with increased
schematicity that resulted from allowing more and more peripheral variants derived from the existing prototype.

Walter Bisang’s “Grammaticalization in Chinese: A Construction-based Account” is the only article in the book that chooses a non-Indo-European language as its main subject. Essential to his analysis are two typological properties of Chinese. One is “precategoriality,” which means “the relative freedom with which one and the same lexical item can be assigned to different grammatical functions” (p. 246). The other is “hidden complexity,” which means that “one and the same surface structure is open to different syntactic analyses.” The two properties, both of which are most prominent in Late Archaic Chinese, throw into doubt Aarts’s (2004) claim that a certain lexical item always belongs to one and the same grammatical category as long as the identity of the form is maintained. He also argues that gradualness/gradience (or “continuity” in his preferred terminology) is not always detected in all grammaticalization examples: it can arise only when two or more constructions are fused into a larger structure or a new construction, just as is illustrated by the emergence of resultative constructions in Chinese. The Modern Chinese resultatives have a sequence of two verbs as their component part. The first verb (V₁) is a dynamic verb while the second verb (V₂) is a stative one that denotes a resultative end-point of the V₁. Due to precategoriality and hidden complexity, a V₂ in the precursor constructions of the resultatives functions as either a transitive verb or intransitive verb. In addition, a single verb in Old Chinese can express a result (i.e. an achievement of an action) as well as an action. This flexibility allows a V₂ in the intransitive use to develop into a resultative predicate and gives rise to resultative constructions. The development of the Chinese resultatives thus illustrates how one and the same surface structure comes to be subject to different interpretations in a stepwise way. His analysis also shows that constructions play a prominent role in grammaticalization in Chinese, suggesting that more research focusing on the East Asian language should be done in order to clarify how constructions interact with the process of grammaticalization.

The last article in the volume is “Grammaticalization and Models of Language” by Nigel Vincent and Kersti Börjars. What makes their paper outstanding is their firm stance against the claim that formal and functional approaches are mutually exclusive. They pick up three approaches which are not mentioned at all or only briefly in other papers in the book, i.e. (i) Lexical-Functional Grammar (LFG), (ii) Dynamic Syntax (DS), and (iii) Formal Semantics. They discuss the benefits of the formal approaches in
analysing gradience and the directionality of grammaticalization. In their view, for example, the historical development of the subject marker for discussed by De Smet would be given an elegant explanation in a model such as LFG, where function and constituency are represented independently. Furthermore, they also touch on stochastic OT (Optimality Theory) as a promising model in dealing with diachronic variation in the data. DS is another model that gives us a new understanding of grammaticalization since it reverses the well-known directionality from lexicon to syntax. The emergence of the Spanish clitic system exemplifies how part of the syntactic representation of a clause is pre-compiled as lexical information. As a concluding remark, they state that formal approaches should not be excluded in modeling grammaticalization, writing “awareness of a plurality of approaches means a better appreciation of potential explanations” (p. 296).

4. Evaluation

It should be sufficiently clear by now that the volume has one other aim besides the ones mentioned in Section 2: to compare different approaches to the issues of gradience, gradualness, and grammaticalization. Contemporary studies of grammaticalization initially attracted linguists whose research interests were in semantics or pragmatics. However, it has diversified since then to be an important topic in formal linguistics as well, as is succinctly shown by Vincent and Börjars in this volume. With the increased expansion of this field, the rich variety of viewpoints in the book encourages the readers to widen their horizon, and promotes the understanding of grammaticalization. In addition, it also shows us possible directions for future research in language change.

Another unique feature of the volume is that the contributors clearly submitted their papers for mutual review before publication. This also helps the readers to grasp the pith of the book. For example, Gelderen compares Denison’s functionalist approach to the conversion N(oun) > A(djectve) (e.g. rubbish in a self-confessed “rubbish” golfer > the prize for rubbishest blogger in the world) with her own formalistic explanation of the same phenomenon, and then expresses her disagreement with Denison’s insinuation that strict structuralism is not a very suitable way in analyzing such grammatical change. As her discussion and many other analyses in this volume suggest, there is no single approach or model that can appropriately account for all aspects pertaining to language change. Different approaches may give different answers to one and the same developmental passage; but the
insightful points offered by different theoretical frameworks are compatible with one another in many case studies. In fact, Gelderen shares with Denison the view that the N > A shift is a stepwise process rather than a big saltation. This convergence between the two approaches can be attributed to the recent development of micro-parameters and feature analysis within Minimalism (see the overview of Cinque (1999) and Roberts and Roussou (2003), presented by Roberts in the volume).

Unfortunately, however, the diversity in approach among the papers can in turn present some weak points. To be sure, most of the authors in the volume helpfully try to clarify their theoretical assumptions and terms before they launch into specific analyses. However, the variation associated with the use of terminologies among the contributors requires caution on the readers’ side. Take the term *construction*, for instance. De Smet utilizes the notion of construction with the purpose of underlining redundant grammatical representations over multiple levels of generalization. Bisang, on the other hand, adopts construction grammar in order to focus on the absence of “continuity” associated with a lexical item that occurs in more than one functional slot (e.g. Chinese *gěi* ‘give; to’). The term *continuity* may also be problematic to the readers. Bisang apparently uses the term without a clear distinction from *gradualness*. To the possible bewilderment of the readers, however, the editors explicitly state their refusal of equating continuity with gradualness in the first paper of the volume (p. 25). It is true that careful readers will immediately notice that the editors reject the equation only in a somewhat restricted way, but the contrast is still rather confusing when going through Bisang’s paper after reading the editors’ article.

In sharp contrast to a wide range of theoretical approaches taken up in the volume, the linguistic data crucial for the analyses in each paper are, to the possible disappointment of typologically-oriented readers, almost entirely confined to Indo-European languages (with the only exception of Chinese in Bisang’s paper). Many more examples from non-Indo-European languages would be helpful, not only in revealing different manifestations of grammaticalization in the world, but also in generalizing the relationships among gradience, gradualness and grammaticalization, especially in terms of mechanisms in language change and clines that commonly occur cross-linguistically. What is more, a dearth of linguistic data from different languages hampers proper assessment of the validity of the unidirectionality hypothesis, one of the early but still controversial ideas in grammaticalization studies claiming that change always proceeds in a single direction.
The shortcomings touched upon above nevertheless do not undercut the strengths of the book. The volume will undoubtedly give anyone interested in language change a fresh viewpoint and a deeper understanding of the issues. Different theoretical models may yield different answers to the same linguistic phenomenon. Noticing this opens up eyes often biased to a single linguistic theory, and takes readers to a new dimension in the study of language.

REFERENCES


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