Grammaticalization in the wild: Source determination and system influences

Research into grammaticalization is broadly based on two partially incompatible assumptions. On the one hand, grammaticalization researchers traditionally put strong emphasis on the source determination hypothesis (e.g. Bybee et al. 1994, Hopper 1991), which is the idea that the trajectory of a grammaticalizational change is predetermined by the formal and semantic structure of the source construction. This concept accounts well for many observed facts and, taken literally, means that a grammaticalization occurs without any influence from the surrounding linguistic system. On the other hand, there is a growing body of research on system influences on grammaticalizing constructions. This includes research into analogical change in syntax (e.g. Harris & Campbell 1995, De Smet et al. 2018), into multiple sources feeding into constructions (De Smet et al. (eds) 2013), and into paradigmatization of grams from heterogeneous parts of speech (Reinöhl 2016: 175-199, Reinöhl & Himmelmann 2017: 403-407). Building on Reinöhl & Himmelmann (2017) this talk explores this tension further, arguing for a place both for source-determined and system-dependent influences on emerging grammatical constructions.

Particularly clear evidence for system influence comes from such grammatical paradigms that consist of grams deriving from different parts of speech. Examples include paradigms of definite and indefinite articles (from demonstratives and the numeral 'one' respectively, Himmelmann 1997, Becker 2021), Dutch determiners (van de Velde 2010) and the New Indo-Aryan postpositions stemming from nouns, adverbs and participles (Reinöhl 2016). I focus in this talk on this type of paradigmatization from heterogeneous sources which contrasts with paradigmatization from homogeneous sources as, e.g., the simple prepositions in western branches of Indo-European all stemming from Proto-Indo-European spatial adverbs.

While paradigmatization has attracted some attention in recent years (e.g. Diewald & Smirnova 2012, Diewald 2020), its precise mechanisms in syntax remain underexplored. Specifically, at least two scenarios are imaginable for paradigms developing from heterogeneous sources. Firstly, the resultant paradigm may arise from a convergence between constructions. A convergence scenario would not require complete parallelism as its outcome. For example, we might find residual differences in functionally irrelevant or no longer productive morphology. Secondly, a gram may project a full new construction based on the model of an existing gramcum-construction. In this case, we would expect full parallelism between the individual constructions making up the paradigm. This talk explores these alternatives drawing on recent advances in inflectional morphology where paradigmatic change has been extensively explored and theorized. In accordance with the word-and-paradigm approach, Hill (2020) argues in detail that an inflectional form is created on the pattern of a full word form, rather than affixes being individually substituted in their slots as the result of full or partial convergence. Based on case studies from Indo-Aryan and Germanic, I argue that syntax provides evidence both for holistic change – one might call it a "construction-and-paradigm model" – but also for analytic change showing full or partial convergence.

This talk makes advances towards a better understanding of system influences on grammaticalizing constructions exploring holistic and analytic change in paradigmatization. This research offers insights into source determination as the primary, but not only trajectory-setting force in grammaticalization.

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