

Grammaticalization & Semantic Change

HISTORICAL LINGUISTICS (LING 112/512) – FALL 2017

MARTÍN FUCHS

Introduction

- Changes can occur at *material* levels of language and grammar: that is, changes in sounds and the form of lexical items.
 - But changes can also occur at *immaterial* levels: they do not affect the form of a lexical item, but they affect its **interpretation**:
 1. *nice* 'foolish, stupid' > 'nice' (amelioration)
 2. Lat. *salarium* 'payment with salt' > 'salary, wage'.
 - Certain general semantic processes (metaphorical extension, broadening, narrowing, pejoration, amelioration, etc.) provide us with *post-hoc* typologies of semantic change, but no predictability. While interesting in terms of tracing etymologies, these changes are not that pertinent in uncovering general properties of human languages and grammars.
- **Is there anything predictable to be said about semantic change?**

Grammaticalization

- Phenomena such as *grammaticalization* offer a domain for coming up with **falsifiable theories** of semantic change, given their predictive power.
- Grammaticalization theory aims to describe *how* grammatical forms change over time and *why* they are structured in the way that they are.
 - The forms that *grammaticalization* is interested in are those that express **grammatical meanings**:
 - Negation markers.
 - Tense-Aspect markers.
 - Modality markers.
 - Case markers.
 - Quotatives (such as *like*).
- All of these meanings are mostly **obligatory** expressed across languages (in different ways), but seem to undergo change in their distribution across time.

Grammaticalization

- Lexical material > Grammatical material > Further grammaticalization

3. a basket *full* of eggs > a cupful > hopeful

4. (a). Thys onhappy sowle *was goyng to* be broughte into hell [1482, Monk of Evesham, OED].

(b). I *am going to* like their new album.

- What are the sources for grammaticalization processes and what are the paths that these sources follow across time?

Case Study I: Jespersen's cycle of negation

“The original negative adverb is first weakened, then found insufficient, and therefore strengthened, generally through some additional word, and this in turn may be felt as the negative proper, and may then in the course of time be subject to the same development as the original word” (Jespersen 1917).

- Languages tend to contrast between two kinds of negation: plain and emphatic.
- Across time, the strengthening for emphatic negation is perceived as weak, leading further strengthening.
- A cycle of weakening and strengthening is attested in this domain across languages.

Case Study I: Jespersen's cycle of negation

Jespersen's cycle in English:

Stage	PLAIN	STRENGTHENED	WEAKENING
1.	ne	→ ne a: 'not ever'	→ na: 'not'
2.	ne	→ ne... na: 'not ever'	→ ne... na: 'not'
3.	ne... na:	→ ne... na: wiht 'not a creature'	→ ne... naught 'not'.
4.	not	→ not a bit	

Case Study I: Jespersen's cycle of negation

Jespersen's cycle in English:

- **Morphological/syntactic strengthening:** A plain negation is emphasized with a focused indefinite.
- **Semantic weakening:** The emphatic negation becomes non-compositional, turning into plain negation.
- **Strengthening** adds an expressive resource, while **weakening** eliminates it.
- **Strengthening** involves **morphosyntactic** change, while **weakening** involves **semantic** change.
- Semantic weakening is followed by phonological weakening.

Case Study I: Jespersen's cycle of negation

- This cycle is attested in French, Latin, Greek...
- What could drive a cycle like this in language after language?
- The function of emphatic negation: all languages distinguish between emphatic negation and plain negation.
- Functions of emphatic negation:
 - Denial of an assertion
 - Denial of an expectation/presupposition.
 - Strengthening of a negative assertion
- Overuse of emphatic negation results in loss of emphasis, requiring renewed resources from the language to rebuild this category, ensuring the continuation of the cycle.

Case Study II: Modals

- Sentences with modals are different than assertions (e.g., *The cat is on the mat*); they are *not* claims about the actual world, but rather claims about *possible worlds*.
 5. Lisa *must* go to the supermarket / be super rich.
 6. Lisa *may* go to the supermarket / be super rich.
 7. Lisa *should* go to the supermarket / be super rich.
- Each of these sentences has **deontic** and **epistemic** meanings.
 - *Deontic* modality: compulsion, permission, obligation, driven by norms.
 - *Epistemic* modality: knowledge or beliefs considerations; expresses the speaker's degree of commitment to the truth of the proposition in the actual world.
- **Capacity/ability** modals are different in that they make a claim about the real world:
 8. Lisa *can* count up to 1000.
 9. Lisa *is able to* count up to 1000

Case Study II: Modals

➤ Languages show cross-linguistic variation in what kind of modality is expressed by a single morpho-syntactic device:

➤ **English:**

10. You *may* go now. **deontic: permission**

11. You *may* get to the station if you take bus 66. **epistemic: possibility**

➤ **But Dutch:**

12. Je *mag* weggan nu.

13. * (In order to get to the station), *mag* je bus 66 nemen.

Case Study II: Modals

- **SYNCHRONIC QUESTION (the *structural* component):** Is there a reason why languages often chose the same form to express speakers' degree of commitment to truth and to invoke normative considerations?
- Is there something that these two kinds of modalities share?
- Modal force:
 - Possibility (*may*)
 - Necessity (*must*)
- *must* encodes deontic/epistemic necessity while *may* encodes deontic/epistemic possibility.
- Is there something that distinguish between these two modalities?
 - The set of worlds under consideration.

Case Study II: Modals

- **DIACHRONIC QUESTION:** If these two kinds of modality are related, which one comes first historically?
- Modality expresses subjective judgments about the world and therefore crucially has to do with subjective viewpoints.
- **One claim in the grammaticalization literature is that modal meanings become more and more speaker-oriented diachronically** (*subjectification*, Traugott 1989).
- Deontic modality is less subjective than epistemic modality, because epistemic modality is related with the epistemic state of the speaker.

Case Study II:

Modals: *must*

- *must* is a core modal in Modern English with interpretations high on the obligation/certainty scale and the syntax of a modal verb.
- The situation was very different in Old English. The verb expressed ability and possibility in its earliest stages and obligation only later.
- Further, it expressed deontic modality first and epistemic meanings developed only later.
 - How did *must* go from ability → necessity?
 - How did *must* go from deontic → epistemic?

Case Study II: Modals: *must*

Stage I: Ability/permission

- Ability use of *must* (8th century, Geneses, 2482; Early Old English)
- Internally-determined ability:

14. Wilt ðu gif þu *most* wessan usser her aldordema leordum lareow?
Will you if you are-able be our army leader people teacher
*'Will you, if you **must**, be the leader of our army and teacher?'*

Case Study II: Modals: *must*

Stage II: Deontic necessity/obligation

- In later OE and early Middle English, sentences with *must* appear with a new interpretation –obligation.

15. hit is halig restendæg ne *most* ðu styrigan þine beddinge
it is holy rest-day NEG may you move your bed
'It is a holy day of resting; you **may not** move from your bed'.

- How does this strengthening from weak ability/possibility to deontic obligation happen? Consider:
 - 16. Can you pass the salt?
 - 17. You *can/may* go now (dismissal: *must go*)
 - 18. You *may not* go (scope ambiguity: possible < not // not < possible)

Case Study II: Modals: *must*

Stage III: Epistemic *must*

- So far, what we see is ability-to-obligation shift as a result of invited inferences.
- In Old English, the uses of *must* with an epistemic sense are rare (Exodus, 8th century):
 19. ealle we *moton* sweltan
all we *must* die
'We must all die'.
- In Middle English, we first see the rise of sentences with ambiguous meanings between deontic and epistemic meanings (c. 1225, Lay Brut, 1051):
 20. ho-so hath godes grace is dede *mote* nedes beo guod
He who has God's grace his deed must necessarily be good
'He, who has God's grace; his deed must be necessarily good'.

Case Study II: Modals: *must*

Stage III: Epistemic *must*

- What is the generalization at this stage?
- An increase in the scope of the modal *must*: it is no longer restricted to external world considerations.
- The modal can be used to refer to the evaluation of the speaker based on her knowledge state.
- It is not dependent on normative considerations anymore.

Case Study II: Modals: summary

- ABILITY > DEONTIC NECESSITY > EPISTEMIC NECESSITY
- The jump from **ability to obligation** is because of the way inferences work and also because of negation, which neutralizes contrasts.
- The shift from **deontic to epistemic** usage is tied with how modal meanings tend to become more and more speaker-oriented over time (i.e., convey speakers' attitudes).
- In fact, the same shift has been noted in the domain of adverbs, such as *evidently*, *possibly*, *probably*, *obviously*...

Case Study III - Tense-Aspect marking

The Progressive/Imperfective relation

21. Sam *was baking* a cake

22. Sam *bakes* cakes for a living

23. Sam *knew* the recipe for that cake.

- Let's translate these sentences into languages that we have expertise in (Spanish, French, etc...).
- Are the meanings of grammatical categories the same across languages?
- Does the progressive in English do exactly the same semantic job as the progressive in Spanish?

Case Study III - Tense-Aspect marking

The Progressive/Imperfective relation

- Does the progressive in English do exactly the same semantic job as the progressive in Spanish?
 24. When John arrived, Anna *was working*.
 25. Cuando Juan llegó, Ana *estaba trabajando*.

 26. The socks *were lying* on the floor.
 27. *Las medias *estaban yaciendo* en el piso.

 28. John *was driving* to the university for several months until he rented an apartment closer to it.
 29. ?? Juan *estaba manejando* a la universidad por varios meses hasta que alquiló un departamento más cerca.

Case Study III - Tense-Aspect marking

The Progressive/Imperfective relation

A search for universals

- Are there universal principles or properties of grammatical categories in the tense-aspect domain?
- How would these principles be reflected in diachronic change?
- Do grammatical categories show systematic patterns of change empirically?
- What do these tell us about the organization of the temporal subsystem of grammar?

Case Study III - Tense-Aspect marking

The Progressive/Imperfective relation

Key semantic notions (main types of tense/aspect marking)

- **Perfective:** Indicates that a situation is bounded.
- **Imperfective:** Indicates that a situation is unbounded.
- **Progressive:** Indicates that a situation is in-progress at a given reference time.
- **Perfect:** Indicates that the situation is being described as relevant to a salient reference time (such as speech time).

Case Study III - Tense-Aspect marking

The Progressive/Imperfective relation

Generalizing aspectual meaning

- Beyond being morphological categories, tense-aspect notions are semantic categories that every language can express.
- They denote types of situations in the real world.
- Are there properties which unify types of situations?

Case Study III - Tense-Aspect marking

The Progressive/Imperfective relation

Aspectual categories: similarities

- The **progressive** and the **imperfective** meanings are related because they carry no entailment of a situation being completed or having cease to hold.
30. Sam *weighs* 170 pounds. (**stative**).
 - *does not entail*: Sam has stopped weighing 170 pounds and weighs more or less at speech time.
 31. Sam *was drawing* a circle. (**progressive**).
 - *does not entail*: Sam drew a circle completely.
 32. Sam *used to run* a mile daily (**habitual**).
 - *does not entail*: Sam has stopped running a mile daily.

Case Study III - Tense-Aspect marking

The Progressive/Imperfective relation

Aspectual categories: similarities

- If the **progressive** and the **imperfective** meanings are true for some interval of time, they are true at smaller intervals of time.
33. Sam *weighed* 170 pounds for seven years. (**stative**).
 - *entails*: Sam weighed 170 pounds for most (relevant) intervals within those seven years.
 34. Sam *was drawing* a circle for fifteen seconds. (**progressive**).
 - *entails*: Sam was drawing a circle for most seconds within that interval of 15 seconds.
 35. Sam *used to run* a mile daily for 20 years (**habitual**).
 - *entails*: Sam *used to run* a mile daily for most intervals within those 20 years.

Case Study III - Tense-Aspect marking

The Progressive/Imperfective relation

Aspectual categories: similarities

- The *progressive* and the *imperfective* are related because:
 - they carry no entailment of a situation being completed or having ceased to hold.
 - if they are true for some interval of time, they are true at smaller intervals of that time.
- **Hypothesis:** If these meanings share some kinds of properties, we should expect them to show up with the same marking in different languages.
- And they do! (Russian, Arabic, Sanskrit, Hebrew...)
- But not always... Sometimes languages express them with different markings (English, Spanish, Italian, Hindi).

Case Study III - Tense-Aspect marking

The Progressive/Imperfective relation

Some cross-linguistic empirical observations:

- *Progressive* marking is often expressed periphrastically, while *imperfective* marking is often inflectional.
- Generally, periphrastic marking is the diachronic precursor of inflectional or bound marking.
- Why are progressive categories periphrastic and imperfective categories bound? Is there any diachronic relation?
- YES! Imperfective markers diachronically arise from progressive markers; periphrastic morphology becomes bound in a process of *grammaticalization*:
 - The grammatical morphology of a language is created out of existing lexical material and gradually undergoes change (phonologically reduced and semantically more general).
 - Grammaticalization has correlates in semantic bleaching, obligatory expression, morphological dependence, etc.

Case Study III - Tense-Aspect marking

The Progressive/Imperfective relation

Explaining aspectual change: PROGRESSIVE > IMPERFECTIVE

- The *progressive* is built out of lexical material with the sense of location or movement:
 - location: English: copula + at + V(ing): ‘was at cooking’.
 - movement: Turkish: verb + *-iyor* ‘to walk, to go’.
- Do we have examples of this grammaticalization path?
 - YES!
 - **Middle English:** ‘What *do you read*, my lord?’ (Hamlet, II, 2, 191).
(IMPF-marking for PROG-meaning and IMPF-meaning: **ambiguity**).
 - **Modern English:** What *are you reading?* // What do you read?
(PROG-marking for PROG-meaning) // (IMPF-marking for IMPF-meaning).

Case Study III - Tense-Aspect marking

The Progressive/Imperfective relation

Explaining aspectual change: PROGRESSIVE > IMPERFECTIVE

- Do we have an explanation for the directionality of this change? **Perhaps.**
- **Remember that:** The *progressive* and the *imperfective* are related because:
 - they carry no entailment of a situation being completed or having ceased to hold.
 - if they are true for some interval of time, they are true at smaller intervals of that time.
- The *progressive* is special because it makes reference to an ongoing event.
- The *imperfective* is general because it makes reference to both *events* and *state-of-affairs*.

Maybe what relates these two aspectual categories is a sub/super set relationship:
The imperfective can express what the progressive can express *and more*.

Case Study III - Tense-Aspect marking

The Progressive/Imperfective relation

Explaining aspectual change: PROGRESSIVE > IMPERFECTIVE

- The change is a straightforward result of *generalization*: the progressive morphology loses that bit of meaning which restricts its reference to ongoing events.
 - **Progressive:**
 - a) Refer to a sub-part of some situation.
 - b) The situation must be an event.
 - **Imperfective:**
 - a) Refer to a sub-part of some situation.
- The Progressive-to-Imperfective diachronic change is not arbitrary and sporadic. **It is systematic and rooted in the meanings of these categories:**
 - These categories appear to be universally available and languages chose how to morphologically encode them.
 - Moreover, there is (strict) diachronic directionality in this type of semantic change.