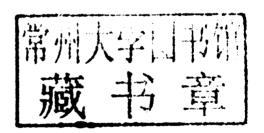# Word-Order Change as a Source of Grammaticalisation

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Acknowledgements

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1. Preface

Grammaticalisation is generally seen as the change whereby lexical elements be-
come grammatical elements and/or whereby grammatical elements become even
more grammatical elements (Meillet 1912, Kuryłowicz 1965, C. Lehmann 1995,
among others). In more recent approaches, this may be formulated as the process
whereby lexical categories change to functional categories (Roberts 1999, S. Fischer
2002, Roberts & Roussou 2003, van Gelderen 2004). In all these approaches, gram-
maticalisation is seen as a unidirectional, irreversible process, which is often
claimed to start out in phonology or morphology, and to have subsequent effects
on syntax, i.e. word-order. Most of these approaches consider word-order change
to be the outcome of grammaticalisation but never the source of grammaticalisa-
tion (Claudi 1994, Roberts & Roussou 2003, among many others); some even go
as far as to suggest that "word-order changes are not to be included in the usual
understanding of grammaticalisation" (Hopper & Traugott 1993: 23).

   In this book I will argue and present evidence in favour of the view that a dif-
ferent perspective is also possible, a perspective where word-order change does
indeed need to be included in our understanding of grammaticalisation.

   Grammaticalisation under this perspective is clearly seen as a loss of func-
tional categories or a loss of the phonological realisation of functional categories
(cf. Roberts 1999, S. Fischer 2002, Roberts & Roussou 2003, van Gelderen 2004).
However, I will argue that this loss of functional material is not triggered by the
loss of case or verbal morphology, i.e. by the loss of morphological cues, as has
been argued by Roberts & Roussou (2003), but instead that the loss of morphology
is triggered by the change in word-order. First word-order changes, and only after-
wards do we lose morphology because it becomes superfluous.

   At first glance, this view does not seem to be very attractive. In particular, it
seems to be in conflict with the very common explanation of phonological erosion
due to internal or external changes because of sociolinguistic or psycholinguistic
reasons or language contact (cf. Detges 2001, Haspelmath 2004). This phonological
erosion is thought to lead in a second step to a loss of morphology, i.e. morpho-
logical triggers (cf. C. Lehmann 1995, Roberts and Roussou 2003), and continues in
a subsequent step to change in word-order. However, recent developments in

linguistic theory make a new perspective possible: in a linguistic environment where grammaticalisation is seen as a regular case of parameter change (Roberts & Roussou 2003: 3, van Gelderen 2004), where morphology has been transferred to syntax, and where phonological features are added only after spell-out, i.e. Distributed Morphology (cf. Halle & Marantz 1993; see also subsequent work in and on this framework including Embick & Noyer 2001, 2004), it seems to be consistent to see grammaticalisation from the opposite perspective, i.e. first the change in word-order, and subsequently the changes in phonology and morphology. This viewpoint is not new, however: Meillet (1912 [1965]) already opens up the possibility that the domain of grammaticalisation might be extended to the change of word-order in sentences (Meillet 1912 [1965: 147]). Von Humboldt (1822 [1972]) in his approach takes the change in word-order as the first step towards the emergence of grammatical elements, which is nowadays summarised under the term grammaticalisation; a similar view is defended in Givón (1971, 1979) and also in Kiparsky (1995).

As will be shown in this book, at present Modern Icelandic offers positive proof of the view that word-order changes precede the loss of morphology. A look at Icelandic data will reveal that this language has developed a very rigid word-order and is currently losing oblique subject constructions and stylistic fronting without having lost any of the relevant morphological markings. A comparison of the historical development of the Germanic and Romance languages with respect to the phenomena of oblique subjects and stylistic fronting will provide the same evidence: word-order changes often precede morphological changes. This comparison of the development of languages belonging to two different branches of the Indo-European family will bring to light the fact that the loss of oblique subjects[1] and the loss of stylistic fronting in both branches can only be accounted for if we adopt a traditional view of grammaticalisation as advocated by Meillet and von Humboldt.

2.   Hypotheses and aims of the book

This book will present a new perspective on the interaction between word-order and grammaticalisation by investigating the changes that stylistic fronting and non-nominative subjects have undergone in Romance (Catalan, French, Spanish) and Germanic (English, Icelandic). The initial goal is to provide an explanation of why non-nominative subjects, stylistic fronting and related verb-third effects

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1.   Note that different terms are used in order to refer to oblique subjects. Next to oblique subjects, one also finds non-nominative subjects and quirky subjects. However, they all describe the same phenomenon.

disappeared in some but not all of the above-mentioned languages; the ultimate goal is to achieve a better understanding of grammaticalisation as an epiphenomenon of regular parameter change.

Looking at the Old Germanic languages as compared to the Old Romance languages, the situation can be characterised by the following facts: stylistic fronting is attested in Old English and Old Icelandic, as well as in Old Catalan, Old French and Old Spanish; the same holds for the phenomenon of non-nominative subjects, which are attested in Old English and Old Icelandic, as well as in the Romance languages Old Catalan, Old French and Old Spanish. For a first impression of the two constructions under investigation, examples of stylistic fronting and non-nominative subjects in the different medieval languages are given in the following.

Stylistic fronting

Stylistic fronting (SF) is standardly understood as a process by which an element is moved in front of the finite verb in those sentences where the position in front of the verb (SpecIP) is not occupied by an overt subject NP. The arguments and explanations regarding why this process applies in some languages but not in others are manifold and so far no generally accepted analysis has been presented that can explain the process in the different languages in which it appears. In the examples below[2] the (a) sentences represent the canonical word-order and the (b) sentences illustrate the word-order after SF has applied.[3]

(1) a. *Se   deofol þa   forleas þæt he hæfde gelæht...*   OE
         the devil then blames that he has   laughed

     b. *Se   deofol þa   forleas þæt he gelæht   hæfde __*
         the devil then blames that he laughed has   __
         'Then the devil blames him for laughing....

(2) a. *at   var   herjat i ríki   hans*   OIce
         that was.3SG harried in kingdom his

     b. *at   herjat var   __ i ríki   hans*
         that harried was.3SG __ in kingdom his
         'that was tormented in his kingdom'

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3.   In order to show which examples stem from which language I will use the following abbreviations: OE = Old English, ME = Modern English, OIce = Old Icelandic, MIce = Modern Icelandic, OCat = Old Catalan, MCat = Modern Catalan, OF = Old French, MF = Modern French, OSp = Old Spanish, MSp = Modern Spanish.

4.   I will indicate the category fronted by SF in **bold** letters, and the launching site for the movement with an underlined space __.

(3) a. *que li   havie   feta*   OCat
         that him   had3SG made

     b. *que feta li   havie   __*
         that made him   had.3SG __
         'that he had made him'

(4) a. *et   as   parlé   a   ton   amant*   OF
         and have.2SG spoken to your lover

     b. *et   parlé   as   __   a   ton   amant*
         and spoken have.2SG __ to your lover
         'and you have spoken to your lover'

(5) a. *e ha   dexado heredades e cases   e palaçio*   OSp
         & has.3SG left   properties & houses & palaces

     b. *e dexado ha   __ heredades e cases   e palaçio*
         & left   has.3SG __ properties & houses & palaces
         'and he has abandoned his properties, houses and palaces'

Oblique subjects

For quite some time it was argued that real "quirky subjects" exist only in Icelandic
(Freidin & Sprouse 1991, Maling 1990), but in the meantime it has been shown
that non-nominaive subjects occur in many other languages as well (cf. Aikhen-
wald, Dixon & Onishi 2001, Bhaskararao & Subbarao 2004). In general we can say
that quirky subjects are NPs in a preverbal/sentence-initial position with a lexi-
cally selected non-nominative case that cannot be derived from thematic roles.[5]
These NPs behave like ordinary subjects with respect to different syntactic phe-
nomena, e.g. control (6b, 8b), ECM (Exceptional Case Marking) (7b), and coordi-
nate subject deletion (9b), (10) among others, even though they don't agree with
the verb in phi-features.

(6) a. *Me   hungreþ ...*   OE
         me.OBL go.hungry.3SG
         'I am hungry'

     b. *þa   ongan   þone   oferhydygan   þyrstan*
         then started.3SG them.ACC overthoughtful thirst.3PL
         on   deaþ
         on   death
         'Then they started to heedfully thirst for death'

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5.   Nevertheless, they can be argued to be semantically determined, although in a negative
sense, since they never denote *Agent*.

(7) a. *Ei   mun þig   hér   mat   skorta*   OIce
         not will you.ACC here food lack
         'You are not going to lack food here'

     b. *Ingólfur.. sagði þeim   vera mál   að setjast um kyrrt*
         Ingólfur.. said them.DAT be   time to sit   on   still
         'Ingolfur said that it was time for them to settle down...'

(8) a. *Senyor, dix l'emperador-, bé.m   plau.*   OCat
         Sire,   says the'emperor-, good.me.OBL pleases.3SG
         'Sire, the emperor says, I like it well'

     b. *No   em   recorda   jamai [PRO] haver llest*
         not   me.OBL remember   never [PRO] have   read
         algun hom ésser estat pus   ardit.
         some   man be   been   more   angry
         'I don't remember having ever known anyone to be angrier'

(9) a. *me   remembre*   OF
         me.OBL remember.3SG
         'I remember'

     b. *quant de ce li   sovient   et __   membre*
         when of this him.OBL   recall.3SG & __OBL   remembers
         'when he remembers and recalls this'

(10) *De los que uos pesa a mi   duele   el   coraçon*   OSp
     of the that you regret to me.OBL hurt.3sg the heart
     de todo lo que Dios   quiere y ___   gusta
     of all   it that God.NOM₍ loves and ___OBL₍   like.3SG
     'As much as you regret this my heart hurts of all that God loves and likes'

This situation contrasts notably with that in the modern languages. In the languages under investigation, stylistic fronting is still active in Modern Icelandic (12), but has been given up in English (11), Catalan (13), French (14) and Spanish (15).

(11) **Then the devil blames that he **laughed** has ___*   ME

(12) *[Sá sem fyrstur er __ að skora mark] fær sérstök verðlaun*   MIce
     he that first   is __ to score goal   gets special price

(13) **que fet   li   ha __*   MCat
     that made him have.3SG

(14) **Parlé   as __   a ton   amant*   MF
     spoken have.2SG to your lover

(15) *Dejado ha   __ heredades, casas y   palacios   MSp
      left   has.3sG __ properties, houses and palaces

Concerning the non-nominative subjects, the picture is rather more complex. They are not a feature of Modern English, their only appearance being in two idiomatic expressions (16a,b), but they do appear in Modern Icelandic (17). In the Modern Romance languages Catalan (18) and Spanish (19) they are also used, however the syntactic status of these non-nominative subjects in Modern Romance has changed considerably. For example they do not allow subject deletion (18b). PRO can only be marked by nominative, i.e. be coreferential with nominative marking; all other case markings result in ungrammaticality (19b). In Modern French the verbs that used to assign a non-nominative subject have either been lost (20a) or have changed so that they now appear together with a nominative subject and a reflexive clitic (20b).

(16) a. *Me*   *thinks*   ME
          me.OBL   think.3sG
          'It seems to me'

      b. *Woe*   *is*   *me*
          misery   is.3sG   me.OBL
          'I'm miserable'

(17) *Hana*   *þyrstir.*   MIce
      her.ACC.SG thirst.3sG
      'She is thirsty'

(18) a. *A mi m'agrada anar libre*   MCat
          to me me'like go   free
          'I like to be free'

      b. *La Mercè_i ama la   música e   *(a la Mercè_i)*   li
          the Mercè_i loves the music   & *(to the Mercè.OBL_i) her
          agraden les   matemàtiques
          likes.PL the   mathematics
          'Mercè loves music and likes mathematics'

(19) a. *A Marcós le   gusta la   músical*   MSp
          to Marcos him like   the music
          'Marcos likes music

      b. *Es   difícil **PRO**   gustarle las   matemáticas* MSp
          is.3sG hard   PROOBL   to.like.him the mathematics
          'It is hard for one to like mathematics'

(20) a. *me   remembre   MF
          me.OBL remember
          'I remember'

     b. Je me   souviens
          I me.REF remember
          'I remember'

It has constantly been argued that stylistic fronting depends on the subject gap
(Holmberg 2000, Maling 1980, 1990) and/or on the verb-second property of these
languages (Maling 1980, 1990). Others have sought to show that the loss of stylis-
tic fronting is connected to the loss of verb movement to I° (Falk 1993, Hrafnbjar-
garson 2004a/b) and/or to the loss of verbal morphology (Mathieu 2006a). With
respect to non-nominative subjects, it has mainly been argued that the existence
and behavioural properties of quirky subjects depend on factors such as lexical
case phenomena and on how nominative case is assigned, via Spec-head agree-
ment or via canonical government (Barðdal 1999, Sigurðsson 1997, Wunderlich
2001, Fanselow 2002, among many others). The loss of non-nominative subjects in
a language is then explained by the loss of case morphology and the loss of the
ability of assigning lexical case (Lightfoot 1979, Allen 1995), or by a change in the
subject properties of these languages (Wunderlich 2001). In addition, the loss of
non-nominative subjects and the loss of stylistic fronting in a language have gen-
erally been explained independently of each other.

I will show that stylistic fronting and quirky subjects depend neither on verbal
nor on case morphology but instead on the availability of additional functional
material. I propose, contrary to what has been claimed, that both quirky subjects
and stylistic fronting have a semantic impact; concerning stylistic fronting I sug-
gest that it is not a mere phonological displacement but has to take place in narrow
syntax. I argue that it is a feature-driven movement operation into a functional
category above AgrSP/TP and below CP, namely into F(ocus)/F(oregrounding)P
in order to check an uninterpretable feature [F] in this category. Oblique subjects
always have an inherent F(ocus)/F(oregrounding) feature; compared to nomina-
tive subjects, oblique subjects put into the foreground or focus the physical and/or
emotional experience of the subject. Therefore, they always move to SpecFP in
order to check the uninterpretable [F] in F°.

The change that occurred with respect to SF and oblique subjects is explained
by the loss of this functional category, i.e. by the change in word-order. The change
in word-order can be accounted for if we adopt a theory of language acquisition
and markedness along the lines of Clark & Roberts (1993) and Roberts & Roussou
(2003). Stylistic fronting and oblique subjects, which passed all the accepted tests,
disappear because the trigger was no longer categorical. Over a long period

structures with and without stylistic fronting existed side by side to indicate the same meaning, i.e. true optionality had entered the system. After having had access to both word-orders for an extended period of time, the learner preferred the structure with less movement; as a consequence stylistic fronting disappeared and the syntactic status of oblique subjects changed. Only after word-order had changed was the morphology lost because it had become superfluous.

The purpose of this book is thus threefold. First, I will provide a qualitative evaluation of the changes that occurred with respect to non-nominative subjects, stylistic fronting and related verb-third effects in the history of certain Romance (Catalan, French, Spanish) and Germanic languages (English and Icelandic).

Second, I will argue that the phenomena of quirky subjects and stylistic fronting are highly interconnected. Both phenomena have a semantic impact in the Germanic and Romance languages, and both make use of an additional category F(oregrounding)/F(ocus)P. Hence, if we find stylistic fronting in one of these languages, we also find quirky subjects that pass all syntactic subject tests (cf. Keenan 1976), and vice versa. This leads to the prediction that if a language loses stylistic fronting, it will also lose the availability of syntactic non-nominative subjects.

Third, in order to account for the loss of SF and non-nominative subjects, I will propose an account in which grammaticalisation is seen as a regular case of parameter change: those languages that have lost these phenomena have lost the possibility of making use of one additional functional category. The loss of oblique subjects and stylistic fronting is taken as a clear example of grammaticalisation. However, in contrast to previous and recent approaches to grammaticalisation, I will show that it is not the loss of morphology that triggers grammaticalisation with the subsequent effect of a word-order change, but that a word-order change, i.e. the loss of a marked structure, sets off grammaticalisation in the functional categories. This is then followed by changes in the morphology. I thus conform to Meillet's and von Humboldt's view of grammaticalisation, i.e. that changes in word-order can be both effects of and triggers for grammaticalisation. Furthermore, I will show that even though grammaticalisation is taken as a parameter change, it still fulfils the requirements of grammaticalisation theory: the parameter change is unidirectional, and therefore follows pathways of change, exactly as is expected for cases of grammaticalisation.

This book is organised as follows: the rest of this chapter addresses some of the methodological issues raised by work dealing with the study of grammatical change and comments on the selection of the data bases that constitute the empirical basis of this work. Chapter 2 gives a brief overview of the history of grammaticalisation theory and how word-order changes are regarded in the different approaches. It will present the different processes involved, the topics studied in this connection,

and discuss two popular approaches of recent years. The main aim of Chapter 2 is to locate my view of grammaticalisation among the existing theories. Although we find excellent overviews of the history of grammaticalisation in C. Lehmann (1995) and Hopper & Traugott (1993), I revisit the different approaches to work out the different views on grammaticalisation and its relation to word-order. Chapter 3 presents the basic assumptions about oblique subjects and discusses the most prominent existing analyses. In this chapter data is provided that clearly shows that all the languages under investigation make use of syntactic oblique subjects. The main aim of Chapter 3 is to demonstrate that the languages under investigation have real syntactic oblique subjects and to show that the properties which have up till now been held responsible for allowing oblique subjects in a language cannot explain their appearance in all the languages examined here. Chapter 4 investigates stylistic fronting. I will evaluate the most prominent approaches and discuss the different constraints to which SF has been argued to be subject. I will show that SF was an option in all the old languages even though for most of these languages under investigation the subject gap and/or the checking of the EPP (Extended Projection Principle) feature do not seem to be defining characteristics of SF. Chapter 5 develops an analysis within a Minimalist framework that is able to capture the availability of stylistic fronting and quirky subjects and to explain all the data that have so far remained unexplained in other approaches. Finally, in Chapter 6 I will propose an account of the loss of stylistic fronting and oblique subjects by portraying grammaticalisation as the loss of the phonological realisation of functional categories. It will be shown that the loss of functional material is independent of the loss of case or verbal morphology; instead, some changes that we observe in the morphology of the languages seem to be a result of the change in word-order.

3. Diachronic data and electronic corpora

One of the most difficult tasks to accomplish when studying syntactic change has always been to determine whether an older stage of a language displays certain types of constructions that no longer exist in the modern language. Since the study of diachronic data is based exclusively on evidence from written corpora, we are faced with a lack of negative evidence that is impossible to overcome.[6] In addition, we are faced with philological difficulties, such as the questions of whether texts reliably represent a certain historical period or geographic dialect, and whether written texts represent all the properties of the spoken language in a linguistic

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6.   One of course cannot ask any native speaker or use judgements based on our own intuitions of whether a certain grammatical construction would have been acceptable or not.

community. However, in recent years the task of linguists interested in diachronic syntax has become easier, since many of the historical manuscripts are now electronically available. This means that the historical data that we consult is not reduced to one or two manuscripts, but that large and often representative corpora of the different periods can be consulted. In addition, it is of course much easier to find specific constructions in electronic corpora. Fifty years ago, a linguist still needed to read his or her way through every page of an old manuscript in the search for a certain construction; today we can often conduct – depending on the kind of corpus – an electronic search for the same construction within minutes. Nevertheless, many problems remain due to the differences between the available electronic corpora and because of the methodological differences involved in searching for different constructions.

3.1   The electronic corpora used

For this book, several different electronic corpora have been used for the different languages.

To investigate Old Catalan, the corpus of S. Fischer (2002) and the corpus CICA (*Corpus informatizat del català antic*) were used. CICA is the most extensive Old Catalan corpus currently available, with more than 4 million words of prose and poetic texts, assembled by the University of Valencia and the University of Alicante. It has unfortunately not yet been tagged and/or syntactically parsed. Hence one can search for lemmas and specific two-word sequences but not for syntactic constructions.[7] S. Fischer (2002) is a rather small corpus of about 8000 sentences of prose text that ranges from Old to Modern Catalan, but the corpus is coded with respect to different syntactic constructions, among these stylistic fronting and oblique subjects. This is why both corpora were used.

In order to investigate quirky subjects and stylistic fronting in Old French, the *Nouveau corpus D'Amsterdam: Corpus informatique de textes littéraires d'àncien français (1150–1350)*, was used. The Amsterdam Corpus of Old French Literary Texts was compiled at the beginning of the 1980s by a group of scholars under the direction of Anthonij Dees and resulted in the *Atlas des formes linguistiques des textes littéraires de l'ancien français* (1987). The electronic version of the texts was provided by Piet van Reenen (Free University of Amsterdam). It contains about 200 different texts, some of them in several versions, which adds up to a total of almost 300 text samples with more than three million words (tokens). The new

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7.   More detailed information on this corpus is available at *http://lexicon.uab.cat/cica/*.