

Grammaticalization

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A Conceptual Framework

Bernd Heine, Ulrike Claudi,
and Friederike Hünemeyer

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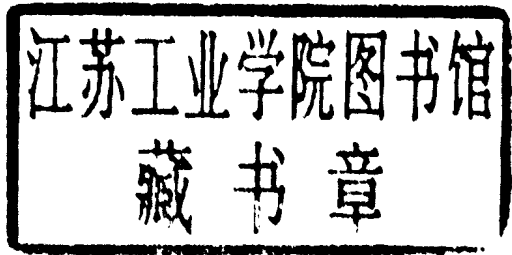
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B.H., U.C., F.H.

Abbreviations

ABL	ablative	IMP	imperative
ABS	absolute	IMPERF	imperfect
ACC	accusative	IMPFV	imperfective
ACT	actor	INCL	inclusive
ADV	adverb	INDEF	indefinitive
ALL	allative	INF	infinitive
AND	andative suffix	INGRESS	ingressive
AOR	aorist	INSTR	instrumental
ASP	aspect	INTR	intransitive
ASSOC	associative	IO	indirect object
AUX	auxiliary	LOC	locative
BEN	benefactive	MASC	masculine
CAUS	causative	NEG	negative
CL	noun class	NF	nonfuture
COMP	complementizer	NOM	nominative
COND	conditional	NOMI	nominalization
CONJ	conjunction	NP	noun phrase
COP	copula, copulative	OBJ	object
DAT	dative	OPT	optative
DEF	definite marker	part	participle
DEM	demonstrative	PASS	passive
DET	determiner	PAST	past
DIR	directional	PERF	perfect
DO	direct object	PFV	perfective
DS	different subject	PL	plural
DUR	durative	POSS	possessive
EMPH	emphatic	PREP	preposition
ENC	enclitic	PRES	present
EXCL	exclusive	PROG	progressive
FEM	feminine	PURP	purposive
FOC	focus	Q	interrogative
FUT	future	RED	reduplicative
GEN	genitive	REFL	reflexive
GER	gerund		

REL	relative	TNS	tense
REP	repetitive	TOP	topic
SG	singular	TRANS	transitive
SIN	singulative	VEN	venitive
SS	same subject	VOC	vocative
STAT	stative		
SUB	subordinate	1	first person
SUBJ	subject	2	second person
SUBJUNCT	subjunctive	3	third person

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1 Introduction

Our minds delight in the discovery of resemblances, near and remote, obvious and obscure, and are always ready to make them the foundation of an association that involves the addition of a new use to an old name.
[Whitney 1875:86]

1.1 Some Notions of Grammaticalization

According to Kuhn (1962), a new theoretical “paradigm” starts with the scientist becoming aware of certain anomalies that are not predicted by the existing paradigm and that may even contradict it. The development of a new paradigm is completed once existent anomalies can be predicted within the new theoretical framework.

Most post-Saussurean models of grammar rely—explicitly or implicitly—on the following tenets:

- a) Linguistic description must be strictly synchronic.
- b) The relationship between form and meaning is arbitrary.
- c) A linguistic form has only one function or meaning.

The main purpose of the present work is to propose solutions to problems resulting from these premises. The nature of the problems involved may be illustrated by the following example taken from Ewe, a language belonging to the Kwa branch of the Niger-Congo family, spoken in eastern Ghana, southern Togo, and southern Benin.¹ Consider the following two sentences:

- (1) me-ná ga kofi
 1SG-give money Kofi
 ‘I gave Kofi money’
- (2) me-ple βotrú ná kofi
 1SG-buy door give Kofi
 (a) ‘I bought a door and gave it to Kofi’
 (b) ‘I bought a door for Kofi’
- (3) me-wɔ dɔ́ vévié ná dodókpó lá
 1SG-do work hard give exam DEF
 ‘I worked hard for the exam’

Whereas in sentence (1) the element *ná* is a verb meaning ‘give,’ in sentence (2) it is ambiguous and may be interpreted alternatively as a verb (‘give’) or as a benefactive preposition (‘for’), and in (3) *ná* can be interpreted only as a preposition (‘for’).

We are dealing here with an instance of grammaticalization, whereby a lexical item, the verb 'give,' assumes a grammatical meaning, that of expressing a "prepositional" notion, 'for' or 'to' in certain contexts,² a process that has occurred in a number of languages worldwide.³

Not only is our interpretation of this process based on the meaning or translation of the relevant sentences, but it is also borne out by the morphosyntactic behavior of *ná* in these sentences. Thus, in sentence (1), where *ná* has full lexical meaning, it may receive the entire range of verb inflections. The same applies to sentence (2), as far as meaning (*a*) is implied. If, however, the intended meaning is that of (2*b*), *ná* loses its lexical status to become a grammatical element and appears in a "decategorized" form (cf. Hopper and Thompson 1984); that is, it no longer accepts verbal inflections such as tense, aspect, or negation markers. *Ná* in sentence (3) is an invariable function word that, unlike a verb, may not be preceded by a coordinating conjunction such as *éyé* 'and,' thus rendering sentence (4) ungrammatical:

- (4) * me-wə dɔ́ vévíé éyé me-tsó-e ná dodókɔ́ lá
 1SG-do work hard and 1SG-take-3SG give exam DEF

Where a lexical unit or structure assumes a grammatical function, or where a grammatical unit assumes a more grammatical function, we are dealing with grammaticalization, a process that can be found in all languages known to us and may involve any kind of grammatical function. The implications that grammaticalization has for language structure, as well as for language description, are considerable. First, grammaticalization can be described alternatively as a diachronic or a synchronic phenomenon. Within a diachronic perspective, we might say that the verb *ná* "has developed" some prepositional uses, that is, that the verbal uses preceded the prepositional ones in time.

Within a synchronic analysis, grammaticalization provides a challenge to the notions of discrete morpheme classes or sentence constituents. In previous grammars of Ewe, for example, the morpheme *ná* has been cited as a case of homonymy, denoting a verb 'give' on the one hand and a preposition 'for, to' on the other (cf. Ansre 1966). Assuming that this analysis is correct, how is the meaning of *ná* in sentence (2) to be interpreted? Does the semantic ambiguity of *ná* in (2) involve overlapping homonymy, or are we dealing with a third "homonym," one that combines both verbal and prepositional uses? In the latter case, one might argue that this ambiguity is a result of translation rather than of inherent semantics.

That a homonymy/discrete-category approach raises a number of questions becomes even more obvious in view of the fact that the above data have provided a highly simplified, if not distorted, account of the actual situation: sentences (1), (2), and (3) include but a small collection of the many possible uses *ná* has. Given enough contexts in which this form occurs, it would be possible to demonstrate

that these uses can be arranged along a continuum extending from prototypical verbal uses, as in (1), to prototypical prepositional uses, as in (3). Sentence (2) exemplifies only one of a large range of possible points along this continuum. This means that, rather than analyzing the structure of *ná* in terms of discrete categories such as constituent types or morpheme classes, a more appropriate approach would be that which highlights the continuum nature of linguistic structures.

A theory of grammaticalization has to account for problems of this kind. In the present work, we wish to propose a framework for dealing with such problems.

The by now classic definition of the term “grammaticalization” was provided by Jerzy Kuryłowicz ([1965] 1975:52): “Grammaticalization consists in the increase of the range of a morpheme advancing from a lexical to a grammatical or from a less grammatical to a more grammatical status, e.g. from a derivative formant to an inflectional one.” More or less the same definition has been used by other scholars and will be adopted here.⁴ A number of alternative terms—such as “reanalysis” (see 8.2), “syntacticization” (Givón 1979a:208ff.; see 8.7), “semantic bleaching” (see 2.3.1), “semantic weakening” (Guimier 1985:158), “semantic fading” (Anttila 1972:149), “condensation” (Lehmann 1982:10–11), “reduction” (Langacker 1977:103–7), “subduction” (Guillaume 1964:73–86), etc.—are occasionally used as synonyms or near synonyms, although in most cases they refer to certain semantic or syntactic characteristics of grammaticalization. Grammaticalization has also been referred to as “grammaticization” (e.g., Givón 1975a:49; Bolinger 1978:489; Bybee and Pagliuca 1985) or “grammatization” (Matisoff, in press).⁵

Some authors have drawn attention to the problem of how grammaticalization is to be delimited from lexicalization. Most of them would agree that, when words belonging to an open class, like that of nouns, develop into closed class words such as adverbs, this constitutes an instance of grammaticalization. Anttila, however, argues that this is also an instance of lexicalization.⁶

In a number of works, the term refers only to the initial phase of the process, that is, to the development from lexical to grammatical structure. Thus, for Samuels (1971:58), grammaticalization “consists of intake from lexis”; it takes place when a word becomes “sufficiently empty of lexical meaning.”⁷ According to Sankoff (1988:17), it is present when “the once content-words or open-class morphemes of the language have become function words, or closed class morphemes.”

Other authors again confine the use of the term “grammaticalization” to the transition from pragmatic structures to syntax. Hyman (1984:73, 83), for example, observes that pragmatics provides much of the substance of syntax, and he reserves the term “grammaticalization” to “the harnessing of pragmatics by a grammar.” It would seem that such narrow definitions restrict the use of the term unnecessarily, especially since it would require an alternative terminology for the

development from less to more grammatical structure on the one hand and for the entire development on the other.

Other authors again define the term in a wider sense than the one adopted here. In a number of more recent studies, for example, it is discussed in terms of coding strategies (cf. Mithun, in press), and, for Levinson (1983:9), grammaticalization simply covers "the encoding of meaning distinctions . . . in the lexicon, morphology, syntax and phonology of languages."⁸ Within the framework of emergent grammar proposed by Hopper, grammaticalization is used as a near synonym to grammar: "There is, in other words, no 'grammar' but only 'grammaticization'—movements toward structure" (Hopper 1987:148).

What is common to most definitions of grammaticalization is, first, that it is conceived of as a process. Most frequently it has been claimed to form essentially a diachronic process.⁹ Thus, Kuryłowicz (1964) remarks in the preface to his *Inflectional Categories of Indo-European*, "Such shifts as *iterative* > *durative*, *static present* > *perfect*, *desiderative* > *future*, *adverb* > 'concrete' case > *grammatical case*, *collective* > *plural* . . . recur constantly and independently in all languages. They represent diachronic universals and must be somehow enrooted, directly or indirectly, in the elementary speech situation." Note also Traugott and König (in press), who define the term in the following way: "Grammaticalization . . . refers primarily to the dynamic, unidirectional historical process whereby lexical items in the course of time acquire a new status as grammatical, morphosyntactic forms, and in the process come to code relations that either were not coded before or were coded differently."

Other authors again have emphasized that grammaticalization can also be defined or interpreted as a synchronic process (cf. Lehmann 1986; Heine and Claudi 1986b). In a number of works, however, it is not specified how a grammaticalization process is to be conceived of.¹⁰ Second, while the term "grammaticalization" has been applied to all kinds of domains, including that of phonology (cf. Anderson 1981; Booij 1984:273–74), most scholars treat grammaticalization as a morphological notion, that is, as one that concerns the development of a given word or morpheme.

A third characteristic that is implicit in these definitions and has frequently been mentioned as an intrinsic property of the process is that grammaticalization is unidirectional, that is, that it leads from a "less grammatical" to a "more grammatical" unit, but not vice versa. A few counterexamples have been cited (e.g., Kahr 1976; Jeffers and Zwicky 1980; Campbell, in press). They concern either degrammaticalization or regrammaticalization (cf. Greenberg, in press). The former is present when the direction of grammaticalization is reversed, that is, when a more grammatical unit develops into a less grammatical one, while the latter applies when forms without any function acquire a grammatical function.¹¹ Although both degrammaticalization and regrammaticalization have been ob-

served to occur, they are statistically insignificant and will be ignored in the remainder of this work.¹² Note that many cases of alleged degrammaticalization found in the literature on this subject can be shown to be the result of an inadequate analysis (see Lehmann 1982:16–20).

1.2 Previous Approaches

The question as to the origin and development of grammatical categories is almost as old as linguistics. This fact should not stop us, however, from viewing grammaticalization as a new paradigm. In the present section, some developments in grammaticalization studies will be reviewed to provide a better understanding of this paradigm, although more detailed historical treatment of the subject is urgently required (for details, see Lehmann 1982).

1.2.1 Earlier Works

It would seem that the notion of grammaticalization was first recognized outside the world of Western scholarship. At the latest, since the tenth century, Chinese writers have been distinguishing between “full” and “empty” linguistic symbols, and Zhou Bo-qi (Yuan dynasty, A.D. 1271–1368) argued that all empty symbols were formerly full symbols (Harbsmeier 1979:159ff.).

An interest in grammaticalization, as we now conceive of it, however, goes back to the eighteenth century. Scholars such as the French philosophers Etienne Bonnot de Condillac and Jean Jacques Rousseau argued that both grammatical complexity and abstract vocabulary are historically derived from concrete lexemes. Condillac was apparently the first to notice that verbal inflections such as tense suffixes are historically derived from independent words (Condillac 1746, 1749)—an observation that appears to have inspired generations of nineteenth-century scholars engaged in formulating the principles of comparative (Indo-European) grammar.

It was Condillac’s contemporary J. Horne Tooke who may be regarded as the father of grammaticalization studies. For Horne Tooke, the “secret” of words lies in their etymology. A key notion in his work, which appeared first in 1786 and 1805 and was published later in one volume (Horne Tooke 1857), is “abbreviation”: nouns and verbs are called “necessary words” and are considered to be the essential parts of speech, while other word classes, such as adverbs, prepositions, and conjunctions, result from the abbreviation or “mutilation” of “necessary words.”¹³ Inflectional and derivational forms are treated by him as fragments of earlier independent words agglutinated to the root word (see Robins [1967] 1979:155–58).¹⁴

That verb forms inflected, for example, for tense or aspect can be explained as being the result of the coalescence of several independent words had already been pointed out forty years earlier by Condillac (1746). Horne Tooke’s work, how-

ever, led to such observations being used to develop a theory according to which language in its original state is “concrete” and “abstract” phenomena are derived from concrete ones.

Grammaticalization was also a topic in linguistics throughout the nineteenth century. It formed a central theme in the work of Franz Bopp (1816, 1833) on the principles of comparative grammar. In the tradition of Horne Tooke and other eighteenth-century scholars, Bopp presented numerous examples of the development from lexical material to auxiliaries, affixes, and, finally, inflections. Grammaticalization, as conceived of by Bopp, forms an important parameter in understanding diachronic Indo-European linguistics.

August Wilhelm von Schlegel (1818) presented a number of thoughts that have come up again in recent discussions on grammaticalization. His “paper-money theory,” as we propose to call it, according to which words are stripped of their semantic content in order to facilitate their circulation in language, is based on some of the paradigm cases of grammaticalization: the development from demonstrative to definite article (cf. Greenberg 1978a), from the numeral ‘one’ to an indefinite article (cf. Givón 1981), or from *have*-constructions to perfective/past markers (Fleischman 1983):

Man entkleidet einige Wörter ihrer Bedeutungskraft und läßt ihnen nur einen Nennwert (*valeur nominale*), um ihnen einen allgemeineren Kurs zu geben und sie in den Elementarteil der Sprache einzuführen. Diese Wörter werden zu einer Art Papiergeld, das den Umlauf erleichtert. Zum Beispiel irgendein Demonstrativpronomen wird zum Artikel. Das Demonstrativpronomen lenkt die Aufmerksamkeit auf einen Gegenstand, dessen reale Präsenz es anzeigt; als Artikel zeigt es nur noch an, daß das Wort, dem es vorangeht, ein Substantiv ist. Das Zahlwort *ein* wird unter Verlust seines numerischen Wertes zum unbestimmten Artikel. Ein Verbum, das das Besitzen bezeichnet, verbindet sich mit einem anderen Verbum als Hilfsverb und drückt nun nur noch den idealen Besitz der Vergangenheit aus. [Schlegel 1818:27–28, quoted in Arens 1969: 190]

Even more influential was a lecture presented by Wilhelm von Humboldt in 1822 (and published in 1825) to the Academy of Science in Berlin, entitled “Über das Entstehen der grammatischen Formen und ihren Einfluß auf die Ideenentwicklung” (On the origin of grammatical forms and their influence on the development of ideas). Humboldt defended Horne Tooke’s thesis that word classes such as prepositions and conjunctions “have their origin in real words denoting objects” (Humboldt 1825:63), and he proposed the following four-stage evolution of means employed for achieving grammatical designations:

Stage I (which he calls “the lowest stage”): idioms, phrases, and clauses;

Stage II: fixed word order and words vacillating between “matter and form meaning”;

Stage III: “analogs of forms,” which are “pure expressions of relations”;

Stage IV (“the highest stage”): “true forms, inflection, and purely grammatical words” (Humboldt 1825:66).

This model, which later came to be known as the “agglutination theory” or “coalescence theory” (Jespersen 1922:376), is closely related to the well-known three-stage typology developed by Schlegel and Humboldt: Stages I and II roughly correspond to the isolating type, while Stage III is suggestive of the agglutinating and Stage IV of the inflectional type. Furthermore, this model reveals Humboldt’s major motivation for dealing with grammaticalization: linguistic typology and the way it correlates with the evolution of language and thought.

It was Franz Wüllner who developed perhaps the most pronounced notion of grammaticalization during the first half of the nineteenth century. In his *Über Ursprung und Urbedeutung der sprachlichen Formen* (On the origin and original meaning of linguistic forms), he summarized his findings in the following way: “From these few examples we may draw the conclusion that designations for all non-perceptible are derived from perceptible [concepts]” (Wüllner 1831:14). His examples include instances of the development from independent word to inflection, for example, from auxiliary verb to tense inflection, or from self-standing pronoun to bound personal ending, and he discussed in some detail the transition from periphrastic constructions to tense markers.

A comparable perspective was adopted by William Dwight Whitney (1875) in his *Life and Growth of Language*. While his evolutionary thesis and a number of his etymologies are no longer tenable, some of his views on semantic change are immediately relevant to modern conceptions of grammaticalization. According to Whitney, transfer and extension are important factors in semantic change; they lead to “a movement in the whole vocabulary from the designation of what is coarser, grosser, more material, to the designation of what is finer, more abstract and conceptional.”¹⁵ This development, he argues, is not confined to the lexicon; rather, it also leads to the emergence of grammatical forms, involving a process of “attenuation, a fading-out, a complete formalizing, of what was before solid, positive, substantial” (Whitney 1875:89–90, 90). One of his examples of how lexemes enter “into the service of formal grammatical expression” concerns the development from a verb ‘seize, grasp’ (Latin *capere*), to one expressing possession (Latin *habere*, English *have*), to a perfect marker on the one hand (e.g., *I have gone*) and a marker of obligation (*I have to go*) and futurity (French **je fendre ai > je fendr-ai* ‘I’ll split’) on the other. The following passage illustrates his way of semantic reasoning:

Present possession often implies past action: *habeo cultellum inventum*, *habeo virgulam fissam*, *habeo digitum vulneratum*, ‘I possess my knife (recovered after loss), I possess a twig that is split, I have a wounded finger:’ here the several conditions have been pre-

ceded by the several acts, of finding, splitting, wounding. On this absurdly narrow basis is built up the whole immense structure of the “perfect”-tense expression: the phrase shifts its centre of gravity from the expressed condition to the implied antecedent act; and *I have found the knife, ich habe das Messer gefunden, j’ai trouvé le couteau*, become indicators of a peculiar variety of past action contemplated as completed. [Whitney 1875:91]

Various works by German scholars that appeared in the second half of the last century dealt with issues that are only now beginning to be discovered as being of interest to grammaticalization studies. Attention should be drawn, *inter alia*, to the studies of Wegener (1885), in particular to his concept of *Sprachleben* and his description of discourse pragmatic patterns developing into morphosyntactic constructions. Furthermore, we owe some important contributions to grammaticalization theory to Riis (1854) and Christaller (1875), two German missionaries working on the Twi (Akan) language in Ghana, who presented a new framework for describing the development from lexical to grammatical categories (Lord 1989). By the time Georg von der Gabelentz ([1891] 1901:250–51) proposed the notion of an evolutionary spiral to describe the development of grammatical categories, the “what-today-are-affixes-were-once-independent-words” paradigm had become almost a commonplace in linguistics. Gabelentz’s attempt to account for grammaticalization in terms of two “driving forces,” *Bequemlichkeitstrieb* (indolence, ease) and *Deutlichkeitstrieb* (distinctness), had a considerable impact on early twentieth-century views of grammaticalization: “Nun bewegt sich die Geschichte der Sprachen in der Diagonale zweier Kräfte: des Bequemlichkeitstriebes, der zur Abnutzung der Laute führt, und des Deutlichkeitstriebes, der jene Abnutzung nicht zur Zerstörung der Sprache ausarten lässt. Die Affixe verschleifen sich, verschwinden am Ende spurlos; ihre Functionen aber oder ähnliche bleiben und drängen wieder nach Ausdruck” (Gabelentz [1891] 1901:256).

Subsequent generations of linguists were concerned with more detailed descriptions of this process. Toward the end of the century, for example, the semanticist Michel Bréal pointed out, “Among all words of a certain kind, distinguished by a certain grammatical imprint, there is always one which is little by little drawn apart from its fellows. It becomes the pre-eminent exponent of the grammatical conception of which it bears the stamp. But at the same time it loses its individual value, and is no more than a grammatical instrument, one of the wheels of the phrase” (Bréal 1897, quoted in Matisoff, *in press*).

It was Bréal’s compatriot, Antoine Meillet, who may be called the founder of modern grammaticalization studies. His “L’évolution des formes grammaticales” (1912) marks the beginning of a perspective of grammaticalization that is still prevalent today. Meillet not only introduced the term *grammaticalisa-*

tion (1912:133), but he also justified the relevance of grammaticalization studies as one of the major activities in the science of language.

In his discussion of the transition of words from what he referred to as *mots principaux* to *mots accessoires*, Meillet followed Bopp, rather than Humboldt, in using grammaticalization as an explanatory parameter in historical linguistics. Like Gabelentz, he argued that linguistic development proceeds in spirals, and his discussion of the distinction between *affaiblissement* (weakening) and *expression intense* (intensive expression) is also strongly reminiscent of that between Gabelentz's two driving forces.

Meillet claimed that there are only two ways in which new grammatical forms arise, either via analogical innovation or via grammaticalization (= *l'attribution du caractère grammaticale à un mot jadis autonome*). While the former does not interfere with the overall system of language, the latter leads to a transformation of the entire system by introducing new categories for which no linguistic expressions existed before: "Tandis que l'analogie peut renouveler le détail des formes, mais laisse le plus souvent intact le plan d'ensemble du système existant, la 'grammaticalisation' de certains mots crée des formes neuves, introduit des catégories qui n'avaient pas d'expression linguistique, transforme l'ensemble du système" (Meillet 1912:133). The distinction between analogy and grammaticalization is important to Meillet, especially since it helps him set off his own view from that of the then very powerful neogrammarians, who, he claimed, were preoccupied with only two things: "phonetic laws" and analogical innovation.¹⁶

The transition from lexical items (*mots principaux*) to auxiliaries and other morphemes fulfilling grammatical functions (*mots accessoires*), also referred to as "empty words" (*mots vides*), is described by Meillet as a kind of continuum,¹⁷ although he insists that at the same time this is also a discrete distinction. With this observation on the dual character of the process, he has captured one aspect that any theory of grammaticalization has to take into consideration, as we shall try to demonstrate. Another important observation relates to the inverse correlation between the increase in the frequency of use and the decrease in expressive value that units undergo on their way to becoming *mots accessoires* (Meillet 1912:135–36).

A number of generalizations on language structure that more recently have become key notions of grammaticalization are contained in Sapir's *Language* (1921). Although chapter 5 of this book mainly deals with synchronic typology, it contains a wealth of observations on grammaticalization. For example, what today is referred to as the "bleaching model" (see 4.4) was presented by him under the label "thinning-out process," and our notion of a "form-meaning asymmetry" in the process of grammaticalization (8.1) was described in the following way: "Now form lives longer than its own conceptual content" (Sapir 1921:98).