

# UNIDIRECTIONALITY AND IRREVERSIBILITY IN GRAMMATICALIZATION

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# THE BEGINNINGS OF GRAMMATICALIZATION

- Ideas can be dated back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century: **Bennot de Condillac**
- **August Wilhelm von Schlegel, Wilhelm von Humboldt**
  - Agglutination Theory (with regard to languages in general), OHG > NHG, etc.
- **Georg von der Gabelentz**
  - Agglutination Theory (syntetic > analytic, see above)
  - Bequemlichkeits- und Deutlichkeitstrieb as the two opposing forces responsible for the evolution of languages
- **Term “grammaticalization” coined by Antoine Meillet (1912:133):**
  - [...] the '*grammacticalization*' of certain words creates new forms, introduces categories for which there was no linguistical expression, and transforms the whole of the system.

# A CONTINUUM IN LANGUAGE

- **Language elements vs language rules**
  - Lexicon vs grammar
  - Maximal lexicality vs minimal lexicality
  - Minimal grammaticality vs maximal grammaticality
  - Idiosyncratic, holistic vs analytic, regular

**Lexicon** ----- **Grammar**

**Fuzzy boundaries**



# CLINE OF GRAMMATICALITY

**Content item > grammatical word > clitic > inflectional affix  
(> ∅)**

- Shift towards the right hand side: grammaticalization, delexicalization, bonding?
- Shift towards the left hand side: lexicalization, degrammaticalization, antigrammaticalization, debonding?
- Is the shift towards the left hand side even possible?

# NO DEGRAMMATICALIZATION?

- English and Mainland Scandinavian genitive suffix *-s* > clitic *=s*
- Irish 1<sup>st</sup> person plural subject suffix *-muid* > independent pronoun *muid*
- Japanese adverbial subordinator *-ga* “although” > free linker *ga* “but”
- Saame abessive suffix *\*-ptaken* > clitic *=taga* > free postposition *taga*
- Estonian question marker *-s* > *=s* > free particle *es*
- English infinitive prefix *-to* > proclitic *to=*
- Modern Greek prefix *ksana-* “again” > free adverb *ksana* “again”
- Latin rigid prefix *re-* “again” > Italian flexible prefix *ri-*

(Haspelmath 2004:29)

- Danish *agtig*: StuTS-talk by Nicoline Muck Vinther (22.11.2012)

# DEGRAMMATICALIZATION IS RARE...

“[...] [s]o are pandas, flightless birds and bacteria that metabolize sulphuric acid.”

(Lass 2002:212)

- rareness cannot be accepted as a valid argument against the process of degrammaticalization (black swan)
- But how rare is this process really?
  - 1% of all cases (Haspelmath 1999:1046)
  - 10% of all cases (Newmeyer 1998:275 ff.)
- But 1% or 10% or X% of what?

# WHY IS GRAMMATICALIZATION SO RARE?

- **Grammaticalization of a certain element is a result of its relative overuse**
  - High frequency causes (phonological, semantic, etc.) degrading of an element
  - Inflation vs deflation (Dahl 2001)
    - Overuse of money tends to lead to the loss of its value
    - Inflation also occurs more often than deflation but that does not defy the possibility of a reversed development

# BUT WHAT LEADS TO THIS OVERUSE?

- **Frequent use leads to grammaticalization; but what causes an item to be used more often?**
- **The Invisible Hand Theory (Keller 1994)**
  - “The speakers change their language, but unconsciously, not intentionally or according to a plan.” (Keller 1994:10)
- **The Invisible Hand Theory expanded by Haspelmath (1999) - maxims**

# HASPELMATH'S MAXIMS

1. Hypermaxim: talk in such a way that you are socially successful, at the lowest possible cost.
2. Clarity: talk in such a way that you are understood.
3. Economy: talk in such a way that you do not expend superfluous energy.
4. Conformity: talk like the others talk.
5. Extravagance: talk in such a way that you are noticed.

- These thoughts already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century

- Georg von der Gabelentz: Bequemlichkeits- vs Deutlichkeitstrieb

# INFLATIONARY SPIRAL

- A language form is noticed (extravagance)
- The form becomes socially successful (hypermaxim)
- More and more speakers emulate the others (conformity)
- Prerequisite: the new form is understood (clarity)
  
- Haspelmath (1999) claims that the hypermaxim and maxim of economy, i.e. lowest possible cost, make (almost!; see “overwhelmingly irreversible” and “extremely rare”) any degrammaticalization impossible to occur
- But: not only simple expressions and forms can become socially successful: the beginning of the inflationary spiral
- Both directions are thus possible! G is not irreversible

# WHAT ABOUT UNIDIRECTIONALITY?

- Unidirectionality and irreversibility are not synonymous!
- Grammaticalization as ski jumping (Dahl 2004)



# IS THERE A SOLUTION?

- **Definition of grammaticalizaion including also degrammaticalization:**
  - *Grammaticalization is a gradual process by which the degree of internal dependencies of the parts of a constructional schema is changed. This change may render the internal dependencies stronger, or weaker.*
  - Grammaticalization as an umbrella term for both possible developments:
    - Grammaticalization in a narrow sense
    - Degrammaticalization
  - **No exceptions needed thanks to this unified, broadened definiton**
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