



Grammatical expressions and grammaticalization – a functional theory

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Overview

1. What is a grammatical expression (the standard view)?
2. What is grammaticalization (the standard view)?
3. A functional theory of grammatical expressions and grammaticalization
4. Examples of grammatical expressions and grammaticalization
5. What qualifies an expression for grammaticalization?
6. Grammaticalization features re-visited
7. Grammar as a design feature of human languages
8. Summary



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What is a grammatical expression (the standard view)?

Definition in terms of prototype examples of grammatical expressions

Matthews 2007:

- "**grammmatical meaning** Any aspect of meaning described as part of the syntax and morphology of a language as distinct from its lexicon. Thus especially the meanings of constructions and inflections, or of words when described similarly".

Affixes: *pick-s, pick-ed, pick-ing, pick-Ø*

Clitics: *have-n't*

Auxiliaries: *I am gonna make it*

Definition in terms of the meaning of grammatical expressions ("grammatical meaning").

Matthews 2007:

- "**grammatical morpheme** A morpheme which has grammatical meaning".
- "**grammatical word** [...] One which has grammatical meaning"



What is a grammatical expression (the standard view)?

Problem with prototype definitions of grammatical expressions: Expressions that are not prototype cases.

Grammatical or lexical?

She seems to pick him up

- *she*: lexical noun or grammatical noun?
- *seem*: lexical verb or grammatical verb (auxiliary)?
- *up*: lexical adverb or grammatical particle?

(Prototype categorization is compatible with discrete categorization.)



What is a grammatical expression (the standard view)?

Problems with definitions of grammatical expressions in terms of meaning

Problem 1:

Circularity: Grammatical expressions are defined in terms of grammatical meaning, but grammatical meaning is defined in terms of grammatical expressions.

Matthews 2007:

- "**grammatical morpheme** A morpheme which has grammatical meaning".
- "**grammatical word** [...] One which has grammatical meaning".
- "**grammatical meaning** Any aspect of meaning described as part of the syntax and morphology of a language as distinct from its lexicon. Thus especially the meanings of constructions and inflections, or of words when described similarly".

Solution to problem 1:

Define grammatical meaning independently of grammatical expressions.

Grammatical meanings are:

time meanings like: 'past', 'present', 'future', ...

person meanings like: '1st person', '2nd person', '3rd person', ...

number meanings like: 'singular', 'dual', 'plural', ...

13-08 etc.

Dias 6



What is a grammatical expression (the standard view)?

Problems with definitions of grammatical expressions in terms of meaning

Problem 2: Meaning is a bad definiens.

Example 1: Possession

The king's car

The king owns a car

Example 2: Doubt

West Greenlandic

qama

-junnarsi

-vuq

be.out.hunting.seals

-probably

-3.SG.INDIC

'He's probably out hunting seals'

It is probable that he is out hunting seals



What is a grammatical expression (the standard view)?

Conclusion

The distinction between lexical and grammatical expressions has been a cornerstone in linguistic theory from the earliest beginnings.

Today it plays an important role in all important approaches to the study of language, formal as well as functional.

It serves as to define a number of important theoretical notions. For instance, grammatical rather than lexical coding is often taken to be what distinguishes Aspect from Aktionsart, Mood from Modality, and Tense from Time.

However, there is no good definition of what counts as grammatical expressions.

The distinction itself remains pre-theoretical and intuition-based.



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What is grammaticalization (the standard view)?

'Grammaticalization': a cover term for language changes that create grammar

Definition in terms of prototype examples and features of grammaticalization

going to > *gonna*

Phonological reduction:

3 syllables > 2 syllables

Semantic reduction/loss:

'movement' > 'prospectivity'

Boundness:

I am going > **I am gonna*

Definition in terms of the meaning of the result of grammaticalization: the meaning of grammatical expressions

Matthews 2007:

- "**grammaticalization** [...] The process by which, in the history of a language, a unit with lexical meaning changes into one with grammatical meaning".



What is grammaticalization (the standard view)?

Problem with prototype definitions of grammaticalization:

All prototype features are found also with languages changes that are arguably not grammaticalization changes

Phonological reduction:

<i>Engla-lond</i>	>	<i>England</i>	(Haplology)
3 syllables	>	2 syllables	

Semantic reduction/loss:

<i>The bird <u>flies</u></i>	>	<i>Time <u>flies</u></i>
'movement'	>	'progression'

Boundness:

Danish		
<i>vaske</i> ('wash')	>	<i>vaske op</i> ('do the dishes')
No adverb		Adverb (<i>op</i>) required



What is grammaticalization (the standard view)?

Problems with definitions of grammaticalization in terms of the meaning of the result of grammaticalization: the meaning of grammatical expressions

Problems 1 and 2 are the problems with "grammatical meaning" as a definiens mentioned earlier.

Problem 1: Circularity: Grammatical expressions are defined in terms of grammatical meaning, but grammatical meaning is defined in terms of grammatical expressions.

Problem 2: Meaning is a bad definiens of grammatical expressions: For instance, 'possession' and 'doubt' can be expressed both by clear-cut grammatical expressions and by clear-cut lexical expressions.



What is grammaticalization (the standard view)?

Problem 3: Prototype cases of grammaticalization do not always seem to involve a change in meaning.

Lezgian (Haspelmath 1993: 148)

<i>luhuda</i>	>	<i>-lda</i>
'one says'		'reportive evidence'

Western Apache (de Reuse 2003: 95)

<i>ch'inī</i>	>	<i>ch'inī</i>
vb: 'say.4.SG.IMPF'		particle: 'reportive evidence'

Compare:

<i>they say he is there</i>	>	<i>he is there, they say</i>
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What is grammaticalization (the standard view)?

Conclusion

Just as there is no good definition of what counts as grammatical expressions, there is no good definition of what counts as grammaticalization.

The distinction between grammaticalization and other cases of language change remains pre-theoretical and intuition-based.

Is there any substance to the distinction between lexical and grammatical expressions?

Is there any substance to the distinction between grammaticalization and other cases of language change?



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A functional theory of grammatical expressions and grammaticalization

Two claims:

- 1) There is such a thing as grammaticalization as a distinct type of linguistic change (*pace* Campbell, Janda, Joseph and others in *Language Sciences* 23 (2001)).
- 2) There is such a thing as a distinct class of grammatical expressions, which are the result of grammaticalization (*pace* Hopper 1991: 33).

However, neither grammaticalization nor grammatical expressions can be defined exclusively in terms of a set of discrete features:

- They cannot be defined in terms of morphosyntactic features like boundness.
- They cannot be defined in terms of phonological features like phonological reduction.
- They cannot be defined in terms of content features like semantic reduction.

Grammaticalization and grammatical expressions can be defined only functionally in terms of a unique way of *encoding* linguistic contents into linguistic expressions – i.e. the *status-in-the-code* of grammatical expressions and relations.



A functional theory of grammatical expressions and grammaticalization

Central ideas behind the theory

- Grammar is constituted by expressions (morphemes, words, constructions) that cannot themselves convey the main point of a linguistic message, but serve an ancillary purpose of facilitating communication by providing secondary or background information.
2. Grammaticalization resides in the diachronic development of expressions that serve an ancillary purpose of facilitating communication by providing background information.



A functional theory of grammatical expressions and grammaticalization

Functional definition of grammatical elements:

- Grammatical elements code their content as discursively secondary/cognitively backgrounded (in relation to some other element).
- By contrast, lexical elements code their content as capable of being discursively primary/cognitively foregrounded.

Bob liked the king



A functional theory of grammatical expressions and grammaticalization

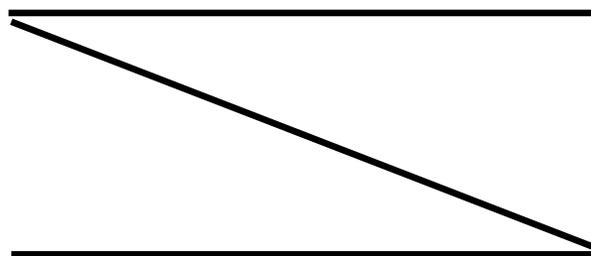
Summary

The relationship between the structural distinction between lexical and grammatical and the usage distinction between primary-foregrounded and secondary-backgrounded:

STRUCTURAL STATUS

Lexical

Grammatical



USAGE STATUS

Primary and foregrounded

Secondary and backgrounded

A functional theory of grammatical expressions and grammaticalization

Functional definition of grammaticalization:

- Grammaticalization is a diachronic change whereby a linguistic element comes to code its content as discursively secondary/cognitively backgrounded (in relation to some other element).

Bob liked that king

<>

Bob liked that **king**

>

Bob liked the king



A functional theory of grammatical expressions and grammaticalization

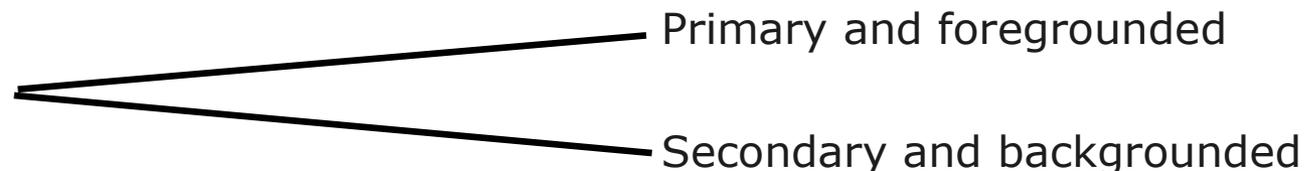
Summary

The change from lexical to grammatical as a change from use as either primary-foregrounded or secondary-backgrounded to use as secondary-backgrounded only

STRUCTURAL STATUS

USAGE STATUS

Lexical



> (Coding/conventionalization of secondary and backgrounded status)

Grammatical



A functional theory of grammatical expressions and grammaticalization

The definitions have two important implications:

1. Grammatical expressions are dependent on some other linguistic expression with respect to which they can be secondary/backgrounded.
2. Grammaticalization involves the creation of such a dependency.

A potentially primary/foregrounded element can stand alone:
Boss of a one-man company.

A secondary/backgrounded element is dependent on a primary element – in *relation* to which it can be secondary:
**Solo sonata for second violin.*

<i>the</i> (grammatical)	vs.	<i>that</i> (lexical)
<i>Bob liked the king</i>		<i>Bob liked that king</i>
<i>*Bob liked the</i>		<i>Bob liked that</i>



A functional theory of grammatical expressions and grammaticalization

Two types of grammatical content (i.e. two types of information coded as secondary and backgrounded) can be distinguished in accordance with the theory

5. Substantial content

- the content coded by *the* in:
Bob liked the king

9. Relational content – relations between substantial contents

- the relations coded by the construction:
Bob liked the king



Only substantial content can also be coded as potentially primary and foregrounded.

A functional theory of grammatical expressions and grammaticalization

Criteria for grammatical status

Two criteria for grammatical status follow from the theory:

ADDRESSABILITY CRITERION

Grammatical expressions are *not addressable in discourse* (under normal circumstances).

Cp. the fact that question words are always closed classes.

FOCUS CRITERION

Grammatical expressions *cannot be brought into focus* (under normal circumstances).

In so far as negation brings into focus what it negates, the focus criterion entails that grammatical expressions cannot be negated independently.



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Examples of grammatical expressions and grammaticalization

Prototype cases of grammatical expressions

Example: The contrast between expressions like *go* and expressions like *gonna* as a contrast between lexical and grammatical status.

go is a lexical expressions by both criteria:

ADDRESSABILITY CRITERION

- *He is going to Rome.*
- *How (going)?*

FOCUS CRITERION

What he likes is to go to Rome.

gonna is a grammatical expression by both criteria:

ADDRESSABILITY CRITERION

- *He is gonna clean up.*
- *How (clean up/*gonna)?*

FOCUS CRITERION

**What he likes is (to) gonna.*



Examples of grammatical expressions and grammaticalization

Non-prototype cases of grammatical expressions

Example: The contrast between demonstratives like *that* and articles like *the* as a contrast between lexical and grammatical status (cf. Diessel 1999).

Articles are grammatical expressions by both criteria:

ADDRESSABILITY CRITERION

- *I love the picture.*
- **Really, the (one)?*

FOCUS CRITERION

- *Was it the or the other (picture) you meant?*

Adnominal demonstratives are lexical expressions by both criteria – although they are traditionally regarded as grammatical (e.g. by Talmy):

ADDRESSABILITY CRITERION

- *I love that picture.*
- *Really, that (one)?*

FOCUS CRITERION

- Was it that or the other (picture) you meant?*



Examples of grammatical expressions and grammaticalization

Prototype cases of grammaticalization

Prototype cases of grammaticalization are:

language changes which consist in a grammatical expression developing from a lexical one.

Compare the definitions of grammaticalization in:

Meillet 1921: 131:

- "le passage d'un mot autonome au rôle d'élément grammatical", "l'attribution du caractère grammatical à un mot jadis autonome".

Kuryłowicz 1965: 52:

- "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 [...]".

Matthews 2007:

- "The process by which, in the history of a language, a unit with lexical meaning changes into one with grammatical meaning".



Examples of grammatical expressions and grammaticalization

Prototype cases of grammaticalization: *going* > *gonna*

he is going to Rome

>

No competition for primary/
foregrounded status

he is going (in order) to fix the room

<>

Competition, but *going* wins:
primary/foregrounded *going*

he is going to fix the room (tomorrow)

>

Competition, and *going* loses:
secondary/backgrounded *going*
= **basis for grammaticalization**

Coding of sec./backgr. status
= **grammaticalization**

he is gonna (*in order to) fix the room (tomorrow)

Coded sec./backgr. status
= **result of grammaticalization**



Examples of grammatical expressions and grammaticalization

Prototype cases of grammaticalization: *I think* (lexical) > (grammatical)
(Boye & Harder 2007, forthc.)

I think *about* ***you***

No competition

I think *he is the best ever* (*don't you?*)

Competition, but *I think* wins:
primary/foregrounded *I think*

<>

I think ***he is the best ever*** (*isn't he?*)

Competition, and *I think* loses:
secondary/backgrounded *going*
= **basis for grammaticalization**

>

Coding of sec./backgr. status
= **grammaticalization**

he is, *I think,* ***the best ever*** (**don't you?*) Coded sec./backgr. status
= **result of grammaticalization**



Examples of grammatical expressions and grammaticalization

Non-prototype cases of grammaticalization: Reanalysis

he threatened to lose the game (on purpose)



>

Coded sec./backgr. "control" interpretation

Reanalysis in context

*he threatened to lose the game (*on purpose)*



>

Sec./backgr. "raising" interpretation

Coding of sec./backgr. interpr.
= **grammaticalization**

it threatened to rain all day



Coded sec./backgr. interpr.
= **result of gzn.**

Note: This does not entail that *threatened* is an auxiliary.



Examples of grammatical expressions and grammaticalization

Non-prototype cases of grammaticalization: Syntacticization (Givón 1979: 209).

my ol' man,
TOPIC

he rides with the Angels
PRO

Sec./backgr. 'topic-of' relation
as a pragmatic phenomenon:
'What comes first, is what it is all
about'

>

Coding of sec./backgr. relation
= **grammaticalization**
(+ semantic change:
'topic-of' > 'subject-of')

my ol' man
SUBJECTAGR-

he-rides with the Angels

Coded sec./backgr. relation
= **result of gzn.**

'What comes first, is the subject'



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What qualifies an expression for grammaticalization?

Morphosyntactic qualification:

A candidate for grammaticalization must co-occur with something with respect to which it can express its content as secondary and backgrounded. In other words: A candidate for grammaticalization must co-occur with something which can compete with it for primary and foregrounded status.

Bolinger 1980: 297:

- "The moment a verb is given an infinitive complement, that verb starts down the road to auxiliariness".
- Not correct, but almost.

he is going to Rome

No competition

>

he is going (in order) to fix the room

Competition

Only losers qualify for grammaticalization!



What qualifies an expression for grammaticalization?

Semantic qualification:

"Grammaticalizable concepts"/"grammaticizable notions"

– what is common to them?

A candidate for grammaticalization must express or imply a meaning which often occurs as – and which is highly useful as – a secondary and backgrounded companion to a primary and foregrounded meaning.

That is:

A candidate for grammaticalization must have a content which enhances the usefulness of its primary and foregrounded companion.

What qualifies an expression for grammaticalization?

Semantic qualification (continued)

Potential candidates for grammaticalization as propositional particles:

they say vs. *my son is afraid*

What is useful as a secondary/backgrounded companion to propositions is an indication of the reliability with which it can be taken to be true (or false):

the volcano is exploding

my son is afraid the volcano is exploding

they say the volcano is exploding

Unlike *my son fears*, *they say* is a good candidate, since:

- it gives an indication of reliability (evidence)
- it is generally applicable



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Grammaticalization features re-visited

Grammaticalization features

going to > *gonna*

Phonological reduction:

3 syllables > 2 syllables

Semantic reduction:

'movement' > 'prospectivity'

Boundness:

I am going! > **I am gonna!*



Grammaticalization features re-visited

What motivates phonological reduction

<i>going to</i>	>	<i>gonna</i>
3 syllables	>	2 syllables

The traditional view: frequency of use

An alternative view: iconicity

Low prominence on the content side (secondary/backgrounded status)
is reflected in
low prominence on the expression side.

Frequency and iconicity do not exclude each other as motivating factors



Grammaticalization features re-visited

What motivates semantic reduction/loss?

going to > *gonna*
'movement' > 'prospectivity'

A new view:

6. Semantic generality is a prerequisite for grammaticalization:

A good candidate for grammaticalization is generally applicable and thus has a general meaning.

9. Semantic reduction follows from grammaticalization:

A content coded as – and thus invariably conveyed as – secondary and backgrounded, has low poignancy and is thus likely to lose contours (cf. the low poignancy and lack of contours of the background of a photograph).



Grammaticalization features re-visited

What motivates boundness?

going to > *gonna*
I am going! > **I am gonna!*

A new view:

Boundness is a direct consequence of grammatical expressions coding their content as secondary and backgrounded:

Grammatical expressions require the co-occurrence of expressions with respect to which their content can be secondary/backgrounded.

What does boundness mean in relation to grammaticalization?

Lots of lexical expressions are bound by the constructions they occur in.

With respect to boundness, grammatical expressions differ from lexical expressions only in that they require the co-occurrence of expressions with respect to which their content can be secondary/backgrounded.



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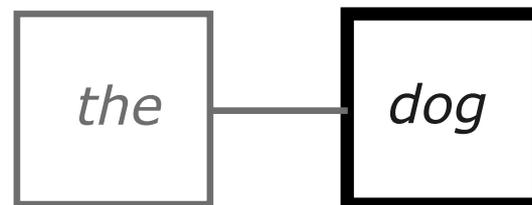
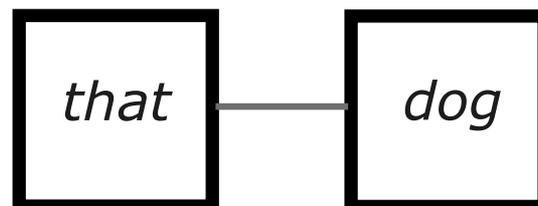
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Grammar as a design feature of human languages

Three basic types of expressions in human languages

- Expressions that code substantial content as potentially primary/foregrounded
- Expressions that code secondary/backgrounded relations
- Expressions that code substantial content as secondary/backgrounded



Grammar as a design feature of human languages

The ontogenesis (and phylogenesis?) of grammar

3. Singular expressions with prim./foregr. substantial content (holophrases)

that?

2. Combination of expressions with prim./foregr. substantial content

that!

dog!

11. Coded sec./backgr. relations between expressions with prim./foregr. content

that

dog

4. Expressions with coded sec./backgr. substantial content

the

dog

Grammar as a design feature of human languages

Hierarchization of information:

primary/foregrounded vs. secondary/backgrounded information

Coded hierarchization of information is a design feature of human languages.

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Summary

1. The distinction between grammatical and lexical expressions is pre-theoretical and intuition-based.
2. The distinction between grammaticalization and other types of language change is pre-theoretical and intuition-based.
3. Solution: A functional theory the basic idea of which is that grammar is concerned with providing secondary and backgrounded information, and which emphasises the status of grammar as a design feature of human languages.



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