

Grammaticalization meets Construction Grammar: Syntactic reanalysis and actualization

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Grammaticalization theory (see, e.g., Lehman 1994, Traugott & Hopper 2003) defines grammaticalization as the change (i) of a lexical form to a grammatical form (e.g. verb > auxiliary) or (ii) of a grammatical form to a more grammatical form (e.g. auxiliary > bound morpheme). As pointed out by Noel (2007), this might pose a problem for construction grammar, where lexical and grammatical structures are both considered as constructions differing only in degree of schematicity. Moreover, if grammaticalization is defined as the emergence of new constructions, then any syntactic reanalysis is an instance of grammaticalization which, however, renders the concept totally non-explanatory.

This paper presents some case studies which directly address this theoretical discussion, looking at (i) the evolution of *okay* in English, Dutch and Swedish and (ii) the remarkably parallel evolution of the French loan *ça va* (litt. 'it goes' = 'ok') in Belgian Dutch (see Lemmens 2012). These are all instances of **syntactic reanalysis** and **actualization** (the emergence of new syntactic behaviour, i.e. new constructions). Our analyses, based on extensive data drawn from synchronic as well as diachronic corpora¹, show that, despite some differences, the same three steps can be distinguished in the different languages:

- (i) the word is first used as an **interjection** (or discourse particle);
- (ii) this particle is then used in a new syntactic environment, viz. as a **predicative adjective** (e.g., *N is okay*; *N is ça va*);
- (iii) then as a **attributive adjective** (*an okay N* or *a ça va N*).

The evolution from predicatively to attributively used adjective is not unlike the actualization of *fun* discussed by Denison (2001) and De Smet (2012). For *ça va* in (Belgian) Dutch there is even a fourth step, viz. the use as an **adverbial modifier** (intensifier), e.g., *This is ça va logical* (= "quite logical").

Strictly speaking, such cases of actualization are not instances of grammaticalization. Indeed, some of the uses of these new "evaluative adjectives" are similar to earlier uses when the word was used as an interjection. Our analyses thus confirm De Smet's view that actualisation is driven by similarity. However, for some of the new uses, there are additional semantic changes, i.e. a meliorization, which is even followed by an evolution to an intensifier for *ça va* (in adverbial use). While the new constructional environment may have laid the basis for such a change, it does not explain it; the new semantic value, we argue, is the result of pragmatic (i.e. contextual) factors, and can thus be regarded as examples of "subjectification" (Hopper & Traugott 2003). Our corpus-based analyses also reveal how frequency and collocational preferences are a driving force towards these particular semantic changes (cf. Bybee 2010). In short, while different from grammaticalization *per se*, syntactic reanalysis and subsequent actualization in the cases analysed here have given rise to new semantic values (via subjectification). In a more systems-theoretical perspective, our analysis shows how the (now mature) usage-based model and grammaticalization theory mesh to account for different aspects of language change.

References

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¹ The corpora consulted are: COHA, COCA, (spoken) BNC, Leuven Corpus of Late Modern English, Parole, Språkbanken, Corpus of Spoken Dutch (CGN), Twitter, WebCorp, Parole, Corpus of Spoken Dutch (CGN).