When secondary grammaticalization starts: a look from the constructional perspective

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ABSTRACT

The paper argues in favor of the definition of secondary grammaticalization as a separate grammaticalization process. It is suggested that secondary grammaticalization should be restricted to its original conception presented in Givón (1991), and it is this idea of secondary grammaticalization that allows for some relevant empirical and theoretical insights.

From a constructional point of view, a distinction between constructionalization and constructional changes is introduced, whereby a grammaticalization process is conceptualized as a sequence of constructionalization and specific constructional changes. The concept of constructionalization is relevant to detect the initiation of a change. Constructional changes that follow make sure that a new construction is involved in a grammaticalization process. Two case studies from German serve to illustrate the model. The discussion will show that, first, secondary grammaticalization may start from different points in an ongoing process of (primary, earlier) grammaticalization, and does not require this process to be completed. Second, it will be suggested that secondary grammaticalization, though displaying universal regularities, heavily hinges on language-dependent factors, as similar processes in different languages may not equally qualify as secondary grammaticalization.

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1. Introduction

The terms primary and secondary grammaticalization, originally coined by Givón (1991), have received many different and sometimes conflicting interpretations in the recent research on grammaticalization. A wide and diversified range of phenomena have been discussed under this umbrella term (cf. e.g. Breban, 2010; Kranich, 2008, 2010; Norde, 2012; Waltereit, 2011). This shows that many empirical studies have taken the theoretical delineation of this concept for granted. However, as has been convincingly demonstrated by Breban (2012, forthcoming), the theoretical status of this concept is problematic. Also the fact that this entire volume is dedicated to secondary grammaticalization suggests that the notion still needs to be clarified.

In her careful examination of different definitions of secondary grammaticalization used in the recent literature, Breban (forthcoming) comes to the conclusion that the concept of secondary grammaticalization is not useful at all:

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Overall, the changes identified in the definitions above can all be captured within a general definition of grammaticalization, and neither of them justify the addition of secondary grammaticalization as a separate notion. (Breban, forthcoming)

The goal of this paper is twofold. First, it attempts to rescue the notion of secondary grammaticalization. It will be argued that – if secondary grammaticalization is restricted in its original sense defined by Givón (1991) – this concept is indeed justified, as it allows a more differentiated view on directionality of grammaticalization clines. Specifically, the concept can be used to conceptualize splits occurring during grammaticalization and leading to divergence and polygrammaticalization(s), in a way slightly different from the traditional view. Two points originally raised by Givón (1991) will be given a particular importance here: (i) changes usually "form a complex, interactive diachronic drift, whose intricate course cannot be reduced to a simple one-cause – or even a simple one causal-chain model" (Givón, 1991: 258); and (ii) "some of these secondary pathways may turn out to be highly regular" (Givón, 1991: 305).

Second, taking a constructional perspective, this paper will introduce a model that focuses on the contextual factors during grammaticalization. It evolves around the distinction between constructionalization and constructional changes introduced in Smirnova (forthcoming), which in some respects overlaps with the distinction proposed by Traugott and Trousdale (2013). Constructionalization, understood here as initial formation of a new construction in a language, differs crucially from processes of constructional changes in that it essentially involves rise and fixation of contextual restrictions. This leads to semantic and structural reorganization whereby previously accumulated contextual constraints are (re-)analyzed as inherent parts of a new construction. During the following constructional change(s), the new construction extends into new contexts while the restrictions gradually loosen. This distinction will be used to determine the initial phase of secondary grammaticalization. The main point will be that once a new constructionalization process can be determined within a grammaticalization process of a particular item or construction, it unambiguously means that this item or construction is involved in a process of secondary grammaticalization.[1]

The structure of the paper is as follows. In Section 2, two alternative views on secondary grammaticalization will be briefly introduced. It will be argued that the definition of secondary grammaticalization as an independent, complete process of grammaticalization bears some important theoretical consequences and allows for a more differentiated view on directionality of grammaticalization. Section 3 will introduce the concepts of constructionalization and constructional changes in detail. In Section 4, the distinction will be illustrated using two case studies from German: the secondary grammaticalization of *würde* & infinitive, and the development of epistemic variants of modal verbs. Section 5 concludes with a short summary and some questions for further research.

2. Secondary grammaticalization: two competing definitions

The most intuitive understanding of secondary grammaticalization concerns the nature of its input: it is pretty obvious that source items of secondary grammaticalization should be already grammatical(ized) elements.[2] This intuitive idea has been at the core of most definitions proposed in the literature. Views on secondary grammaticalization differ mainly in terms of how exactly the grammatical status of input material is conceptualized. Generally, there are two broad accounts to primary versus secondary grammaticalization. These are prominently represented by Traugott (2002), Detges and Waltereit (2002), and Kranich (2008) on the one hand, and by Givón (1991), on the other. There are some points of disagreement between the proponents of the former view (see Breban, forthcoming for a detailed account); these can be however neglected in the following, as they do not influence the line of argument presented here.

In the first interpretation, secondary grammaticalization is identified with the advanced or end stages of grammaticalization. This is made explicit for example by Norde (2012: 76), who refers back to Traugott (2002) and Kuryłowicz (1975 [1965]). The development of grammatical items out of lexical material is termed primary grammaticalization, whereas changes within the domain of grammar are associated with secondary grammaticalization. Thus, primary and secondary grammaticalizations are parts of a grammaticalization cline, as shown in Fig. 1 below (taken from Norde, 2012: 76).

Though this view is not inconsistent from a theoretical point of view, there are some problems with it. Most importantly, the question of what counts as "less grammatical" and "more grammatical" still needs to be clarified. This point is closely connected to the even more serious one, namely where exactly to put the dividing line between primary and secondary grammaticalization. From the representation in Fig. 1 above, it seems that one could move the position of the starting point of secondary grammaticalization further to the right, as no convincing justification is given as to why primary grammaticalization has to end at this particular point and why secondary grammaticalization has to begin there. Again, the criterion of

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[1] It is however possible that the detected constructionalization is the beginning of a change other than grammaticalization, e.g. lexicalization. As however grammaticalization is of primary interest here, it will suffice to demonstrate the usefulness of the notion constructionalization as it is applied to differentiate between secondary and primary grammaticalization processes.

[2] There is a problematic implication that comes together with this idea, as has been pointed out in e.g. Diessel (2012) and Breban (forthcoming). It cannot be stated unexceptionally that any grammatical item is a result of an earlier grammaticalization process. Diessel (2012) e.g. has illustrated this problem using one of the poster child examples of secondary grammaticalization, the change from demonstrative to definite article, showing that the demonstrative cannot be traced back to an earlier process of (primary) grammaticalization. It is thus questionable whether the change from demonstrative to definite article can be rendered a case of secondary grammaticalization, as there has been no primary grammaticalization beforehand. In the following, I will not be dealing with this aspect of the notion.