



Same source, same target, different paths: from ‘person’ to reflexive in Umpithamu and other Paman languages

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Abstract

This study analyses a case of parallel grammaticalization in five genetically related languages, with a lexical source meaning ‘person’ developing to a grammatical function of reflexive marking. Although not typologically unusual, this case is special because, in spite of the overall parallelism, the resulting reflexive markers are located in different parts of the system, either as free or clitic elements associated with a lexical object position, or as bound elements within the morphology of the pronouns. It is shown that this morphosyntactic divergence can be attributed to differences in the organization of the wider grammatical system, more specifically the availability of a number of constructions with pronouns. More generally, this is used as a case study to argue that cross-linguistic studies of grammaticalization should take into account the wider grammatical system in which developments take place, and focus on the morphosyntactic details of the path leading to the grammatical target, in addition to semantic and pragmatic relations between source and target. It is shown that even in the absence of genuine diachronic material, detailed comparison of grammatical systems can uncover systemic factors that motivate morphosyntactic divergence.

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1. Introduction

In this study, I will analyse the development of a lexical item meaning ‘person’ to a grammatical element functioning as a reflexive marker in five Paman languages of Cape York Peninsula (Australia), viz. Kugu Nganhcara, Olkolo, Umpithamu, Uradhi and Wik Mungkan. Even though the lexical source and the grammatical target function are the same in all five languages, I will show that the reflexive marker ends up in different places in the language system, viz. as free or clitic elements associated with the lexical object position in Umpithamu and Olkolo, illustrated with the Umpithamu element *pa* in (1) below, or as bound morphemes within the pronominal paradigm in Uradhi, Kugu Nganhcara and Wik Mungkan, illustrated with the Uradhi morpheme *-ma* in the pronominal complex in (2) below.

- (1) Umpithamu
 ngonhin-mpal pa miinhi-n ilu ngumunguma
 black.ashes-INST RR rub-PST 3SG.NOM black.RDP^a
 ‘He rubbed himself with ashes (until he was) proper black.’

^a The following abbreviations are used in the glosses: ABL ablative, ABS absolutive, ACC accusative, CAUS causative, COM comitative, COMPL completive, CUST customary, DAT dative, EMPH emphatic, ERG ergative, GEN genitive, HAB habitual, IMP imperative, INST instrumental, LOC locative, NEG negative, NOM nominative, OBL oblique, PERF perfective, PRS present, PST past, PTCL particle, QUEST question, R realis, RDP reduplication, RECIP reciprocal, REFL reflexive, RR reflexive–reciprocal, SBJ subject, TOP topic.

- (2) Uradhi
 ama ulu-ma-ulu-ma uya:-ni-ø
 man.ABS 3SG-REFL-3SG-REFL smell-REFL-PRS
 ‘The man is smelling himself.’ (Crowley, 1983, p. 375)

From a theoretical perspective, I will show that this divergence in the grammaticalization of reflexive marking can be attributed to differences in the status of pronouns in the grammatical systems involved, and I will argue that this provides good evidence for the crucial role of the wider grammatical system in which processes of grammaticalization take place. The five languages studied here are genetically related, and they all show a development of a lexical item based on the proto-Paman form **pama* ‘person’ to a grammatical item that marks reflexivity, which means that the paths of grammaticalization involved are superficially very similar. The different morphosyntactic status of the reflexive marker in (1) and (2) suggests, however, that the processes of grammaticalization followed two rather different paths from their lexical source to their grammatical target function. Specifically, I will show that the divergence between the free marker in (1) and the pronominal morpheme in (2) can be explained in terms of the divergent availability of patterns of pronoun-noun apposition, and the divergent availability of free object pronouns, which respectively favoured or blocked the morphological integration of the reflexive marker into the pronominal paradigm.

In more general terms, this case study will demonstrate the need for cross-linguistic studies of grammaticalization to pay more attention to the actual morphosyntactic realization of grammatical target functions, and to look at broader systemic factors that can influence the course of grammaticalization processes. Many cross-linguistic studies of

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