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A tale of two distal demonstratives in Dagaare: Reflections on directionality principles in grammaticalisation

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ABSTRACT

For the past half century, the versatile nature of demonstratives across languages has increasingly attracted attention in language typology. The present study contributes to this research agenda by examining the grammaticalisation pathways of two distal demonstratives in the Lobr dialect of Dagaare (Niger-Congo: Gur), namely, $n\varepsilon$, an adnominal demonstrative, and $l\varepsilon$, a pronominal demonstrative. The analysis reveals that the adnominal demonstrative $n\varepsilon$ first got reanalysed as an identifying copula verb and, subsequently fused with third person pronouns, υ and a, to derive identifying pronouns, $n\upsilon$ and na respectively. Further, the identifying pronouns $n\upsilon$ and na fused with the attributive copula ι to derive the focus particle $n\iota$. The identifying pronoun na has also been reanalysed into an affirmative final particle. On the other hand, the pronominal demonstrative $l\varepsilon$ first developed into a scalar demonstrative determiner and then into an intensifier. Subsequently, the scalar demonstrative determiner evolved into a copula, which fused with third person pronouns υ, a and $b\varepsilon$ to derive the emphatic counterparts of these pronouns, comprising $\upsilon l\varepsilon$, $al\varepsilon$ and $b\varepsilon l\varepsilon$ respectively. These are further cliticised and have evolved into adnominal demonstratives and then postnominal focus particles. These grammaticalisation trajectories contribute to a finer-grained and richer account of the diachrony and typology of demonstratives, including the substantivizing role of morphophonemic fusion on the development of grammaticalisation chains.

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1. Introduction

Demonstratives, in their basic sense, are the linguistic correlates of gesture. Across languages, they indicate the distance of a referent in relation to a deictic centre, the speaker here-&-now (cf. Diessel, 1999, 2013a). This prototype use of demonstratives is illustrated in (1), where *this* and *that* point to entities in the material situation surrounding the clause. However, demonstratives are notably very versatile and their referential meaning is often extended to abstract contexts of pointing as illustrated by the dialogue in (2), where the demonstrative pronoun *that* is used anaphorically to refer to the preceding move in the exchange.

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(1) **This** book is red and **that** is blue.
(2) A: *You have a call.*
     B: *I know **that**.*

The recognition of the versatility of demonstratives and their relationship with other grammatical items across languages has attracted much research interest for the past half century, including areas such as morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics, and grammaticalisation (e.g. Lakoff, 1974; Fillmore, 1982; Anderson and Keenan, 1985; Diessel, 1997, 1999, 2013b; Amfo, 2007; Bhat, 2013; Rybarczyk, 2015: Ch. 2). The present study contributes to grammaticalisation research on demonstratives. Grammaticalisation is defined as the situation where lexical items develop into grammatical items or less grammatical items (or constructions) develop into more grammatical ones (cf. Heine et al., 1991; Hopper, 1996; Heine and Kuteva, 2002; Hopper and Traugott, 2003). Studies have shown that demonstratives develop into definite articles, third person pronouns, relative pronouns, copulas, sentence connectives, complementizers, number markers, and possessives (cf. Diessel, 1999: Ch. 6). In a survey of 620 languages, Dryer (2013) shows that 69 of them use a demonstrative word as a definiteness marker. Bhat (2013) also found that among 225 languages studied, 125 show some affinity between demonstratives and third person pronouns. For example, out of the 52 languages that Bhat (2013) closely examined, demonstratives in 33 languages can be used as third person pronouns and, in the remaining 19 languages, third person pronouns and demonstratives share the same derivational stem. In addition, Bhat (2013) notes that, in some languages, demonstrative pronouns are derived from third person pronouns by adding non-pronominal demonstratives as suffixes to the third person pronouns.

Although these typological studies have shed light on both the extended uses of demonstratives and their grammaticalisation trajectories across languages, studies on individual languages are still needed to give a finer-grained account of the diachrony of demonstratives within the systems of different languages. The present study therefore complements typological generalisations on the grammaticalisation pathways of demonstratives by focusing on a single language from West Africa, namely, the Lobr dialect of Dagaare (Niger-Congo: Gur).[1] It shows how two distal demonstratives, $n\varepsilon$ and $l\varepsilon$, travel along partially similar grammaticalisation trajectories, contributing to a spectrum of identificational meanings in the language. It also sheds new light on the grammaticalisation pathways of demonstratives and draws pertinent implications for further research. The two grammaticalisation chains examined in this study are summarised below, corresponding to the demonstratives $n\varepsilon$ (1) and $l\varepsilon$ (2):

(1)   Demonstrative determiner > Identifying copula > Identifying pronoun >
         Focus particle/Affirmative particle

(2) a. Demonstrative pronoun > Demonstrative scalar determiner > Intensifier
     b. Demonstrative pronoun > Demonstrative scalar determiner > Identifying copula > Emphatic
        pronoun > Demonstrative (pronoun & determiner) > Focus particle

In each of these chains, the deictic (or identification) meaning of the demonstrative is persistently extended from referent-identifying to speaker-stance-identifying functions. We will discuss these grammaticalisation trajectories in relation to typological generalisations on demonstratives and directionality principles in grammaticalisation, including metafunctional shifts.

The study is based on discourse data produced by speakers of Dagaare in Ghana and Burkina Faso. The data are mainly spoken texts, comprising casual conversations, recreational texts (an unscripted play and a movie), media discourse (radio interviews and panel discussions) and workshop reports. They also include written biblical short stories. In some parts of the discussion, however, constructed examples are used for clarity of illustration. The paper is organised as follows. Section 2 describes the techniques and principles used in analysing the grammaticalisation pathways. Section 3 examines the characteristics of the demonstratives $n\varepsilon$ and $l\varepsilon$. Sections 4 and 5 discuss the grammaticalisation chains derived from $n\varepsilon$ and $l\varepsilon$, respectively. Section 6 discusses these grammaticalisation trajectories in relation to some directionality principles. Section 7 concludes the study.

2. Grammaticalisation and internal reconstruction

Grammaticalisation has to do with "the genesis and development of grammatical forms" (Heine and Kuteva, 2002: 2). Since there is no available diachronic data in Dagaare, we adopt the technique of internal reconstruction on synchronic data, the technique of using 'fossil' linguistic phenomena to reconstruct earlier forms (cf. Heine and Kuteva, 2007: Ch. 1). This method is based on the notion that grammatical items are ever evolving, with new forms constantly emerging to co-exist and finally replace old ones, while old forms get further grammaticalised and gradually fall out of use (cf. Hopper, 1987, 1988,

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[1] Dagaare is the language of the Dagaaba people, located in the intersection of the West African countries of Burkina Faso (southwestern), Ghana (northwestern) and Code d'Ivoire (northeastern corner). The Lobr speakers call both the language and its speakers 'Dagara'. We use the label 'Dagaare' because it is the popular one in published work in English (see e.g. Bodomo, 1997, 2000; Dakubu, 2005). Other dialects are Central Dagaare (or 'Southern Dagaare'), Northern Birifor, Southern Birifor, Wiile (or Wule, Ule) and Waali (or Waala, Waale). These dialects form a continuum of intelligibility and most of them are entered in Ethnologue and Swadesh et al. (1966) as separate languages. But we collate an estimated total population between 1.5 and 2 million native speakers (cf. Bodomo, 2000; Lewis et al., 2016).