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Theoretical contexts for the study of lexicalization and grammaticalization

1.0 Purpose of the present study

(1) We are celebrating a fascinating holiday today.

is something we might well say to a visitor from abroad, and not think twice about whether *holiday* and *today* or the *-ing* of *celebrating* and of *fascinating* function differently from the point of view of our knowledge of language. However, linguists, grammarians, and others who study and think about language, how it is structured, how we come to know it, and how it changes concern themselves with just such questions. In the introduction to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics*, Matthews says: “Everyone will agree that linguistics is concerned with the lexical and grammatical categories of individual languages” (1997:vi), and this is what our example in (1) is about: *holiday*, *celebrate*, and *fascinating* are usually regarded as “lexical,” members of large, “open” classes of forms that are relatively infrequently used and express relatively concrete meaning, while *we*, *are*, and *a* are regarded as “grammatical,” members of smaller, relatively “closed” classes of forms that are very frequently used and express relatively abstract meaning. Moreover, *today* is not clearly a lexical or a grammatical form, having partially concrete and partially abstract meaning, and belonging to a rather large set of adverbs. Finally, the *-ing* of *celebrating* and the *-ing* of *fascinating*, although seen as originating in the same grammatical form, are generally understood as having developed differently over time, the former remaining grammatical and the latter becoming lexical. What these differences mean, how this kind of distinction plays out in language change, and what research questions it suggests are among the topics of the present book.

In recent years questions have frequently been raised about the relationship between “lexicalization” and “grammaticalization.” The two terms, like many other linguistic terms, have been used to refer ambiguously to phenomena viewed from the perspectives of relative stasis (“synchrony”) or of change over time (“diachrony”), to the process and to the results of the process, and also to theoretical constructs modeling these phenomena. According to Lehmann (1995 [1982]:6), the first formulation of an opposition between lexicalization and grammaticalization was Jakobson’s (1971 [1959]) characterization of the first as optional, the second as obligatory. Since then, they have been theorized in a number of different ways, sometimes totally independently of each other, sometimes together. One constant in all these uses is pairing of meaning and form, and the extent to which this pairing is systematic or idiosyncratic. The starting point of the present work is to bring together a variety of scholarly debates concerning this relationship in language change, with focus on lexicalization, which has been studied far less systematically than grammaticalization.

The first three chapters are reviews of the literature; the last three propose some solutions. In this chapter, we will briefly introduce the contexts for the study of lexicalization and grammaticalization, most especially on approaches to grammar, lexicon, language change, lexicalization, and grammaticalization. We will not attempt to resolve the differences of opinion. Chapter 2 focuses in more detail on lexicalization, especially the definitions and viewpoints that have emerged during the last fifty years of work in linguistics. Chapter 3 presents recent arguments concerning the similarities and differences between lexicalization and grammaticalization. Chapter 4 suggests one possible integrated approach to lexicalization and grammaticalization that resolves the major debates about their relationship. Chapter 5 addresses some particular problems in the history of English from the perspective of definitions developed in Chapter 4, and Chapter 6 summarizes the book, ending with suggestions for further directions for research.

1.1 Debates concerning grammar and language change

It is impossible to understand how either lexicalization or grammaticalization have been conceptualized without paying attention to underlying assumptions about grammar and its relationship to the lexicon, as well as underlying assumptions concerning the dynamics of language change. A full investigation of these topics would entail a detailed history of linguistics, especially in the twentieth century. Space allows only for some sweeping generalizations here, which, unfortunately, tend to polarize and to be caricatures. However, without some attention to different foundational assumptions, it is often difficult to make sense of the literature or to propose a possible solution to the many issues that have been raised. In Section 1.1.1 we summarize two extreme approaches to grammar, the polar opposites between which much

linguistics has in actual fact been practiced, but which may help frame the varying discourses about lexicalization and grammaticalization.

1.1.1 Approaches to grammar and lexicon: an overview

Toward the end of the twentieth century it appeared that there were essentially two types of linguists – “generative” and “functional” – who, because they were asking fundamentally different questions, often talked past each other (see Croft 1995, 2001; Newmeyer 1998; Darnell, Moravcsik, Newmeyer, Noonan, and Wheatley 1999; Kemenade 1999; Haspelmath 2000a). Although neither group works with a monolithic view of linguistic theory, the functionalist group is more diverse than the generative.¹

On the one extreme, most formal, generative linguists since the 1960s have sought to answer such questions as “What is the system of knowledge of language?” or “How does this system of knowledge arise in the mind/brain?” (see, e.g., Chomsky 1988:3). The object of study is language as an innate capacity of the individual. The assumption is that the language capacity is computational and syntactic, and by hypothesis optimally structured and ultimately binary in nature. It is a self-contained modular mechanism that does not reflect external factors such as cultural or social systems. Nor does it reflect experiential structures such as vision or production factors such as frequency (this is known as the hypothesis of “autonomous syntax”). The universals of language that are posited are absolute in the sense that one counterexample disproves them (see, e.g., Newmeyer 1998:263). On this view, the grammar of a particular language, whether Swahili, or English, is an “epiphenomenon” of an intrinsic capacity and is of little interest beyond providing empirical evidence for hypotheses about general capacities. And on this view, such traditional questions in historical linguistics as “How did the category auxiliary develop in English?” are uninteresting, or worse, not sensible (see, e.g., Lightfoot 1979, 1999; Hale 1998).

At the opposite extreme, since the 1970s a group of “functional-typological” linguists have sought to answer the question of how speakers can use the “bricolage” or “jerry-built structure[s]” (Bolinger 1976:1) of language to impart information, and to get things done (see, e.g., Hopper 1988). As well as seeing language as a cognitive capacity, this approach privileges language as a device for communication between speakers and addressees. Crucially the assumption is that there is a causal relationship between meaning and linguistic structure, and furthermore that external factors may shape language structure. Language is a human activity, not an epiphenomenon of a static capacity (see Lehmann 1993:320). The prime object of study is language use and how it relates to the grammars of particular languages, and

¹ Croft (1995) provides a useful and detailed discussion of different subtypes of functionalism.

how grammars may vary cross-linguistically. Universals of language are considered to be tendencies, not absolutes, and are usually of a general cognitive nature, not autonomous and not specific to language.

The turn of the present century has seen the emergence of several possibilities for a meeting of minds, as some generative linguists begin to try to account for cognition-based structures (e.g., Jackendoff 1983, 2002), for productivity (e.g., Jackendoff 2002), for the dynamic, emergent properties of the speaker's knowledge of the system (e.g., Culicover and Nowak 2003), and for the variation that undeniably occurs in language (see work on Optimality Theory, e.g., Boersma and Hayes 2001; Lee 2001; Bresnan, Dingare, and Manning 2002). Moreover, some "functional" linguists have sought to formalize their work at least in part (see, e.g., Bybee and Hopper 2001 for frequency studies; Croft 2001 for syntax).

Common to many, but by no means all, theories is the notion of "grammar" (whether at the abstract level of Universal Grammar, or at the more empirical level of the grammar of a particular language) that is distinct from the notion of "lexicon." If such a distinction is made, "grammar" is the set of categories, patterns, and organizing principles evidenced by language, most essentially abstract patterns of semantics, syntax, morphology, and phonology that at least in theory permit infinite combinations. By contrast, the "lexicon" is a finite list (for any individual) of (more-or-less) fixed structural elements that may be combined. The lexicon is typically a theoretical concept, as distinguished from a "dictionary," which is a practical description. Hence, there is discussion of a "mental lexicon" (an abstraction and idealization), not of a "mental dictionary" (Matthews 1997:s.v. "lexicon").²

There have been essentially two views of the relationship of the lexicon to the grammar in generative theory of the last fifty years. The first, which Jackendoff (2002) calls the "syntacticocentric approach," assumes that the lexicon is a list of idiosyncratic items which are selected and inserted into syntactic structures (see various versions of generative syntax from "Standard Theory" [Chomsky 1965] through the Minimalist Program [Chomsky 1995]). Phonological and semantic interpretations are derived from the lexicon together with the syntax. The second, proposed by Jackendoff (1997, 2002), provides an alternative architecture: one in which phonological, syntactic, and conceptual structures are parallel components of the faculty of language, and in which lexical items "establish the correspondence of certain syntactic constituents with phonological and conceptual structures" (Jackendoff 2002:131).³ A key proposal in Jackendoff's

² As we will see, while some theories of the lexicon are roughly equivalent to "vocabulary," many are not, since they include grammatical forms such as past tense *-d*.

³ Other proposals that treat the lexicon as part of the combinatorial architecture of a complex set of parallel structures include Lexical Functional Grammar (e.g., Bresnan 2001), and various types of Head Driven Phrase Structure Grammar

work is that the lexicon is multistructured and includes not only highly idiosyncratic, but also more regular elements. This is more in keeping with many functionalist views of the lexicon, which point to parallels between lexical and grammatical organization, although the regularities may be considered to belong to morphology rather than the lexicon (see, e.g., Bybee 1985, 1988; Langacker 1987; Haspelmath 2002). A more detailed discussion of Jackendoff's views, with focus on the problem of distinguishing types of lexical categories, follows in Section 1.2.

1.1.2 Approaches to language change

Because lexicalization (and grammaticalization) will here be conceptualized primarily as historical processes subject to normal constraints on language change,⁴ we will briefly set out some assumptions concerning language change before turning to a more detailed examination of the conception of the lexicon. While a comprehensive examination of theories of language change is far beyond the scope of this introduction,⁵ we will mention here a few factors that will help illuminate the debates over lexicalization and grammaticalization.

Historical linguistics was the focal point of attention in the nineteenth century, during which time many foundational ideas of linguistics were developed, most especially the concepts of structure and pattern. Discovery of such sound laws as Grimm's Law, which showed how the Germanic languages differed systematically in consonant articulation from the other Indo-European languages, and the Great Vowel Shift, which showed how later English differed systematically from earlier English with respect to the place of articulation of the long (later tense) vowels, highlighted the ways in which language phenomena are structured.⁶ Work on

(e.g., Pollard and Sag 1994) and Construction Grammar (e.g., Goldberg 1995; Fillmore, Kay, Michaelis, and Sag 2003).

⁴ There has recently been some confusion about the term "process," depending on whether the term is used restrictively or not. As Newmeyer rightly points out, grammaticalization is not a "distinct process" in the restrictive sense that it is "an encapsulated phenomenon, governed by its own set of laws" (1998:234). He also acknowledges that "process" is most usually used in a non-restrictive sense as a "phenomenon to be explained" (232). We use the term in a slightly different but even more usual non-restrictive way to focus attention on (a) the need for a dynamic perspective, (b) the micro-steps that are obscured by the ">" typical of representations of change.

⁵ For the state of historical linguistics at the end of the twentieth century, see Joseph and Janda (2003).

⁶ The term "Great Vowel Shift" appears to be attributable to Otto Jespersen, see Jespersen (1961 [1909–1941]:Vol. I, Chap. 8).

The advent of “structuralism” in the twentieth century shifted the focus of attention from change in patterns over time to pattern and system as manifested in relative homogeneity and stasis, i.e., synchrony (see especially Saussure 1986 [1916]). Insofar as historical work was done in the earlier part of the century, the focus was typically on comparing synchronic stages of a language, or diachrony. Correspondences or “rules” were usually of the form

This formulation suggested that the structures themselves change, rather than that the representation of these structures differs over time because each generation of speakers has to learn the language anew and uses it in novel ways. More importantly, the structuralist explanation for change was sought in properties of language and languages, in other words, what was thought of as “internal” or “endogenous” change. The formulation in (2) also suggested abrupt change over time, indeed complete replacement of one item by another. However, change always involves variation: older forms and newer forms coexist side by side, in the same speakers as well as in the same community, and a more appropriate formulation is $A > A \sim B > B$ (Hopper and Traugott 2003:49). Even this is misleading, since often, especially in domains that involve meaning, earlier patterns only become restricted or fossilized, not entirely lost. The typical situation is actually (3) where the emergence of B as the only choice may or may not occur:

By the second half of the twentieth century, considerable attention started to be paid to the questions “What is in the arrow?” and “How does change come about?” In a groundbreaking paper calling for integration of synchronic studies of variation with diachronic work, because synchronic variation is the result of and a necessary condition for change, Weinreich, Labov, and Herzog (1968) proposed that the focus of work should be on language variation and change. On this view, study of diachronic correspondences would take a back seat to the solution of several more important problems. These include:

- (a) The constraints problem: What is the set of possible changes and possible linguistic conditions for change? Examples include changes in category status, such as the emergence of a new grammatical category (e.g., article, auxiliary verb), loss of an existing grammatical category (e.g., inflectional case), or chain shifts (e.g., Grimm's Law, the Great Vowel Shift).

- (b) The transition problem: What are the intervening stages that define the path by which A gives rise to B (and typically coexists with it for at least a while)? Change proceeds by small steps, not large leaps (although accumulations of changes may have cascade-like effects that lead to more substantial change). Change by small steps will be discussed more fully under “gradualness” in Section 1.4.2.
- (c) The actuation problem: How does change start, when and where does it start (“actuation”) and how does it spread through the system (“actualization”)?

One type of change that is particularly important for our discussion of lexicalization and grammaticalization is “reanalysis.” In a foundational paper on the topic of syntactic reanalysis, Langacker defined it as covert change: “change in the structure of an expression or class of expressions that does not involve any immediate or intrinsic modification of its surface manifestation” (1977:58). From this perspective reanalysis involves:

- (a) change in constituency, or what goes with what (e.g., change in morphological bracketing of [*a*] *napron* > [*an*] *apron*⁷),
- (b) a change in category labels (e.g., main verb > auxiliary),
- (c) boundary loss (e.g., *be going to* > *gonna*).

Reanalysis is not restricted to morphosyntax: when a lexeme develops new polysemies (e.g., *silly* ‘blessed, innocent’ > ‘foolish’), it has undergone semantic reanalysis.

Another major type of change is analogy: the generalization of a structure (see Kiparsky 1992). By contrast to reanalysis, analogy is overt, and indeed it is often only through analogy that reanalysis can be detected (see Timberlake 1977). Thus, as we will see, when the motion verb construction *be going to* is reanalyzed as a future auxiliary, evidence for this reanalysis comes from use of *be going to* with verbs that do not ordinarily collocate with motion, e.g., verbs of psychological experience such as *like* or *know*.⁸

Weinreich, Labov, and Herzog (1968) made a key distinction between innovation (changes that happen in the individual) and change (changes that spread to others) (see also Milroy 1992; and discussion in Janda and Joseph 2003). In doing so, they proposed a significantly more social view of change than the generative view with which it competed (e.g., Lightfoot 1979). On the generative view, change is equivalent to innovation and is to be found in differences between cognitive states of individuals. Since the focus is on internalized systems, the interest in change lies in how grammars, i.e., internalized sets of patterns and relationships among patterns, change

⁷ *Naperon* ‘small tablecloth’ is a borrowing from OFr.

⁸ Detailed discussion of reanalysis and analogy can be found in Harris and Campbell (1995).

(see, e.g., Kiparsky 1968; Kroch 2001). Syntax is privileged as central and autonomous, not at all or only marginally affected by either semantics or phonology, and the child is privileged as the locus of change, since the small child has to learn the language from scratch.

Toward the end of the twentieth century a dialog developed as “functionalist” theorists sought to greater and lesser extents to integrate the advances in formal linguistics with a perspective on language that paid more attention to construal of meaning and to dynamic aspects of language (e.g., Bybee, Perkins, and Pagliuca 1994; Croft 2000). This was often combined with cross-linguistic work on language typology spearheaded by Greenberg (see, e.g., Greenberg, Ferguson, and Moravcsik 1978). Furthermore, there was a shift away from focus on strictly “internal” change to concern for the role of the speaker in the “basic” two-person interactional dyad, and in the community (see especially Milroy 2003). On this view, not only the child as hearer, but also the adult (especially the young adult) as producer, can be the innovator and therefore the catalyst for change (see, e.g., Haspelmath 1999a). We speak of “language change,” yet strictly speaking, this is a misnomer – it is not language in general or a language in particular that changes; rather, communities of speakers develop different representations of a system. Much of the work on grammaticalization developed in this theoretical context. Since this book is about lexicalization and grammaticalization as types of linguistic change, our approach is largely functional-typological in orientation.⁹

For historical linguists of a functionalist persuasion, the object of study is how language systems can change over time, as attested by written textual data (also spoken data since audio-recordings have become available). A major contributing factor in the growth of historical linguistics at the end of the twentieth century has been the advent of computerized corpora, which give easy access to information about linguistic contexts for change, frequency, and other factors important in answering the questions posed by Weinrich, Labov and Herzog. For historical work on English the Helsinki Corpus has been a major source of data (see Rissanen, Kytö, and Palander-Collin 1993).¹⁰ Such corpora for the most part reflect not the language of small children, but the rhetorical practices and strategic interactions of speakers with hearers, and have suggested to many that a theory of language change needs to be usage- or “utterance”-based, paying attention to meaning and discourse function (Hopper and Traugott 1993, 2003; Croft 2000; Traugott and Dasher 2002). Furthermore, corpora have confirmed that

⁹ For possibilities of combining strictly formal with functional approaches in historical study, see, e.g., Clark (2004).

¹⁰ Kytö (1996) provides a key to the data in the Helsinki Corpus. This corpus and several other corpora of English written and spoken language are available in the *International Computer Archives of Modern English (ICAME 1999)*.

change is both generational (linked to language acquisition) and communal (linked to networks of speakers [Nevalainen 2004:16; Bergs 2005]).

1.1.3 Summary

To summarize up to this point, we have seen that there are opposing conceptions of grammar: one as a self-contained module guided by a set of language-specific and absolute universals operating independently of contextual factors, and the other as a set of general cognitive tendencies strongly shaped by language-external influences. Minimally, these different approaches admit a distinction between “grammar” and “lexicon.” These two conceptions of grammar are paralleled by opposing approaches to language change: one in which change is abrupt, complete, and language internal and may be equated with innovation (from one generation of speakers to another), and the other in which change depends upon variation, proceeds gradually, and is shaped by linguistic and social factors. Studies of grammaticalization and lexicalization have generally been carried out following the latter model of language change.

1.2 Concepts of the lexicon

As a synchronic component of the language faculty, the LEXICON is understood broadly as a finite list of stored forms and the possibilities for combining them. A full conceptualization of this component of language involves distinguishing “lexical category” from “grammatical category” (whether this is a binary opposition or a gradient one). We start this section by introducing some concepts of the units that are stored in the lexicon (1.2.1), then move on to distinctions between categories in the lexicon (1.2.2), and end with some issues concerning gradience and coalescence (1.2.3) and productivity (1.2.4).

1.2.1 The units of the lexicon: holistic vs. componential approaches

A LEXICAL ITEM is the type of unit which belongs to a lexicon, but what kind of unit this is will depend on the theory of the lexicon adopted with respect to whether the units in it are wholes or consist of components of meaning.

Some theories have treated lexical items as unanalyzable wholes (see, e.g., Bloomfield 1933; Chomsky 1965). Lehmann speaks of them as being accessed “holistically”: “the holistic approach is to directly grasp the whole without consideration of the parts” (2002:2). Treating an item holistically “means treating it as an entry of the inventory, as a lexical item” (2002:3). However, other theories of the lexicon have been based on the concept of minimal components of meaning. Individual lexical items are the language-particular representations of such components (e.g., *boy* represents + HUMAN, – ADULT, + MALE). The components do not

represent properties of the world (reference), but rather innate properties of the mind that determine the way in which the world is conceived. For example, Fillmore says: “the ultimate terms of a semantic description I take to be such presumably biologically given notions as identity, time, space, body movement, territory, fear, etc.” (1970:111).¹¹ Such semantic components reflect systematic relations that hold among items in the vocabulary of languages and can be used to compare cross-linguistic correlations between meaning and form, known as “lexicalization patterns,” and to make generalizations about constraints on these correlations. For example, in the case of a “lexical field,” such as verbs of perception, Viberg (1983) proposes that there is a lexicalization hierarchy on two dimensions. One has to do with the number of lexical distinctions available for the verbs of the senses. For example, English distinguishes agentive and experiential *look at*, *see* or *listen*, *hear*, but other languages like Hindi do not, and have only one verb for *look at/see* and another for *listen/hear*. There are no languages with one verb for *look at/see*, and two separate verbs for *listen* and *hear*. On the second dimension, which concerns verbal complexity, “[i]f *look at* (or in a few cases *see*) is expressed by a morphologically complex form, so is *listen to* (or *hear*). But the opposite does not necessarily hold” (Viberg 1983:136). Such theories of lexical components and most especially more recent theories about the way they combine to form lexical representations of complex meanings play an integral role in discussions of “synchronic lexicalization” (see 1.3.1 below). They assume that there are universal semantic components – which being universal are not learned – and various language-specific combinatorial possibilities.

Note that a different term, *LEXEME*, is also sometimes used. While a lexical item may be understood as any member of the lexicon (whether primarily lexical or primarily grammatical), a *LEXEME* is typically contrasted with a grammatical morpheme, or *GRAM* such as *PL* (= plural) (Bybee, Perkins, and Pagliuca 1994). A lexeme refers to a word considered as an abstraction such as *RUN* rather than as its various concrete *WORD FORMS*, or grammatical modifications, such as *run*, *runs*, *ran*, *running*, or *FOOT* rather than *foot*, *foot's*, *feet* (Matthews 1997; Haspelmath 2002). From this perspective, the lexeme *FOOT* is a “stem,” and plural (the vowel alternation in this case) is a grammatical affix.

¹¹ See also, with various proposals, Katz and Fodor (1963), McCawley (1968), Bierwisch (1970), Voyles (1973), Leech (1981 [1974]), Gruber (1976), and Lyons (1977). Initial theories about components of meaning have been developed more fully in the light of questions about interfaces between meaning and syntax in, e.g., McCawley (1968), Jackendoff (1983, 2002), Talmy (1985, 2000), Wierzbicka (1985), Dowty (1991), Levin (1993), Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995), Pustejovsky (1995), among others.