

Grammaticalization and lexical derivation Word formation schemas in Mandarin Chinese

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Under the label “Lexical derivation”, as it is known, are included derivational processes which modify the lexical semantics of the base word, such as Eng. *employ* → *employer* or Ital. *pizza* → *pizzeria* “pizza parlour” (see Kuryłowicz 1936, Beard 1998). Such phenomena have never been a central issue in the research on grammaticalization, nor, generally speaking, in typological studies: in the *World Lexicon of Grammaticalization* (Heine & Kuteva 2002: appendix II), among “target” concepts of grammaticalization only AGENT may be regarded as an instance of lexical derivation. This lack of theoretical treatment may be explained easily, if one considers the extreme variation that we find in lexical derivation (see the pioneering work by Bauer 2002), with a (theoretically) unlimited number of different meanings which may be expressed by it and no organization in paradigms, making interlinguistic comparison difficult.

In the Chinese language, morphologically complex words have been attested since the remote diachrony of the language, including both stem-modifying processes and agglutination of morphemes, mostly lexical and free in the classical language (see Baxter & Sagart 1998); the question of the distinction between (lexicalized) phrases, compounds and derived words is still under debate today (see e.g. Pan W., Ye B. & Han Y. 2004). In our talk we shall focus on the application of the notions of “(lexical) derivation” and “affix” to Chinese, showing that it is possible to analyse as instances of grammaticalized (proto-)derivational formants the right-hand elements in word formation schemas (Booij 2005) such as [[X]n [学 *xué*]]n “branch of science concerned with X” (心理学 *xīnlǐxué* “psychology”) or [[X]x [性 *xìng*]]n “the quality of X / connected with X” (抽象性 *chōuxiàngxìng* “abstractness”).

In these cases we cannot rely mainly on formal criteria, there being no difference in the phonological and orthographical shapes of the “affix” and the equivalent lexeme (see Bisang 1996); however, for such constituents we have diachronic evidence of meaning shifts either reducing the number of distinctive features conveyed by the morpheme or isolating one of its meanings, ideally a peripheral one (*generalizing* and *isolating abstraction*; Heine, Claudi & Hünnemeyer 1991; Ma Q. 2005) which may be regarded as a “diagnostic test” of grammaticalization. Such patterns of semantic evolution are well attested in SAE languages (e.g., O.H.G. *heit* “person, sex, condition, rank, quality” > O. Eng. *hād* > Mod. Eng. *-hood*) and may sometimes be visible even in the synchronic stage (Du. *boer* “farmer” > *-boer* “trader in X”; *sigaren-boer* “cigar seller”, Booij 2005); these facts seem to support our analysis, namely that the grammaticalization of a lexeme (typically a compound constituent) into a (proto-)derivational marker may be observed not only in morphologically rich languages such as the inflectional ones, but also in isolating languages like Chinese, if we take into consideration historical semantics, thus making it possible to define the notions of “affix” and “(lexical) derivation” in a cross-linguistically consistent way. Also, through comparison with analogous data from other isolating languages not belonging to the South-East Asian area, it might be possible to individuate a consistent model of grammaticalization for lexical derivational morphemes, different from what typically happens in inflectional and agglutinative languages.

Selected references

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