

‘Construction Grammaticalization’ in the history of Mainland Scandinavian

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In this paper, the term ‘construction grammaticalization’ is used to describe certain grammatical phenomena where a syntactic construction or a part of a syntactic construction acquiring a specific grammatical function is subjected to fossilization or some sort of constituent structure change that represents a restriction on or a deviation from the productive syntactic patterns of the language. This also applies to certain instances of word order change, which a number of researchers consider to be at most indirectly related to grammaticalization (cf. Hopper and Traugott 2003: 232). It is shown that the following grammatical phenomena of Mainland Scandinavian can be considered as examples of ‘construction grammaticalization’ in various grammatical domains: positional coding of subjects, direct and indirect objects (Kiparsky 1997; Heltoft 2001); existential and presentational sentences with a ‘formal subject’ in the active and passive; cleft sentences, also with a ‘formal subject’, serving as a means of focusing; bipartite pre-nominal possessives involving a reflexive pronoun; bipartite post-nominal possessives involving a non-reflexive personal pronoun. (Faarlund et al. 1997). In addition numerous auxiliary constructions, most of which have come into being since Old Norse, can be analyzed in a similar fashion: ‘be’- and ‘have’-perfect, ‘be/become’-passive, certain passive and resultative constructions with ‘*få* [get]’, and a number of aspectual construction, including so-called ‘pseudo-coordinations’ (Hesse 2007).

It is argued that all these developments have to be seen in the context of the overall development of the Mainland Scandinavian languages, since Old Norse, from a highly synthetic to an analytic morphosyntactic structure type (Schwegler 1990). They are typologically natural instantiations of a steady drift towards morphosyntactic analyticity, thus exemplifying a non-trivial connection between a certain kind of typological change and certain grammaticalization strategies based on construction types on different syntactic levels rather than on individual items (lexemes or morphemes). The by now more or less traditional ‘content item > grammatical word > clitic > inflectional affix’ ‘cline’ (Hopper & Traugott 2003: 7) turns out to be inadequate as a basis for an understanding of the grammaticalization strategies the syntactic constructions in question represent and their typological status.

References (a selection)

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