

**What, if anything, counts as a grammaticalization pathway?
The case of so-called ventive and itive passives**

Philippe Bourdin (Université Paris X and York University, Toronto)

The notion that there exist crosslinguistic “pathways” of grammaticalization is one of the central hypotheses underlying much recent work on grammaticalization (e.g., Heine & Kuteva, 2002). It rests on a set of independent, though mutually reinforcing, assumptions: (I) there is enough semantic commonality, from language to language, between the source lexemes for a given pathway to have a well-defined starting point; (II) the functional meanings at the end of the pathway constitute a typologically well-founded and unitary grammatical category; (III) travel along the pathway is semantically and/or cognitively motivated.

This paper examines whether the development of itive and ventive verbs into markers of “passive diathesis” meets those expectations. As a putative pathway, it has received scant attention from typologists, even though the phenomena involved are attested across a broad spectrum of Indo-European languages (singularly Eastern Gaelic, Romance and Indo-Aryan) and also, though sporadically, in non-IE languages (e.g., Taiwanese, Neo-Aramaic, Angolar).

While the binary opposition between a verb of ‘coming’ and one of ‘going’ is by no means universal, there is considerable empirical evidence that directional deixis is almost as pervasive as personal and temporal deixis and that it tends to be encoded, crosslinguistically, by lexical verbs and/or by markers exhibiting various degrees of grammatical integration (e.g., affixes, clitics, tonal alternations, etc). When it is verbs that do the encoding, they routinely exhibit morphological and syntactic properties that set them apart from fully lexical verbs and thus prime them to evolve diachronically into grammemes. In short, Assumption I above is warranted.

As is shown by recent work, such as Sansò (2003) and several papers in Abraham & Leisiö (2006), Assumption II is not unproblematic: agent demotion tells but one part of the passive story, as do patient promotion/topicalization, subject affectedness and formal markedness, among other prototypical properties associated with passive diathesis as a valence reduction device.

Investigating whether auxiliaries derived from ventive and itive verbs contribute to implementing in regular ways any subset of those properties or operations necessarily impinges on discussion of Assumption III. The actual contribution of Italian *venire* and *andare* to the grammatical features of the predicate in *La finestra viene/va chiusa* has to do with aspect and modality respectively, with *chiusa* taking care of diathesis single-handedly. Not so in Scottish Gaelic, where the passive interpretation of the construction is licensed by the itive marker and where the construction is modally neutral. The itive passives that are a hallmark of Indo-Aryan languages instantiate yet another set of semantic and morphosyntactic configurations. Such facts certainly challenge the view that we are dealing with a unitary pathway of diachronic development. On the other side of the ledger are no less suggestive facts, such as the detransitivizing effect achieved by itive verbs or affixes in languages as genetically diverse and geographically distant as Hayu, Kannada, Ik and Chinantec. The paradox warrants exploring further the semantics of ‘coming’ and ‘going’ in terms of *Aktionsart* (change of location vs. change of state), agentivity and deicticity.

References

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