

From language use to language change
The mechanisms underlying the development of subject marker *for*

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Assuming that language change must emerge directly from the way language is used (Joseph 1992), grammaticalisation (unlike, for instance, analogy) is problematic as a process of change, as it is not directly grounded in principles of synchronic grammatical organisation. This suggests that grammaticalisation may need to be broken down into a series of interconnected changes. Grammaticalisation theory moves in this direction when it recognises sub-processes such as bleaching, decategorialisation, erosion, etc. but this breaking down still does not fully link up to the synchronic principles of language use. Against this background, the aim of this paper is to explore explanations of a grammaticalisation-like change that maximally fit a usage-based model of language and language change.

The change in question is the emergence of the English *for...to*-infinitive. *For...to*-infinitives consist of a *to*-infinitive preceded by a *for*-NP that functions as its subject, as in (1a). It is generally believed that constructions of this type arose as a result of reanalysis of ambiguous sequences with benefactive *for*-NP and *to*-infinitive, as in (1b), where the *for*-NP could either belong with *good* or with the following *to*-infinitive (Jespersen 1940; Visser 1963-73; Harris & Campbell 1995; Newmeyer 1998; Haspelmath 1998). In as far as the change gives rise to a new abstract category – subject marker *for* – it presents us with several of the characteristics of grammaticalisation, including at least bleaching and decategorialisation.

- (1) a. In these cases it is wise for patients to be taken to casualty first
 b. It was good for him to socialise with children his age

On the basis of historical data from the *Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Early Modern English* and the *Innsbruck Middle English Prose Corpus* I show that the traditional reanalysis scenario is problematic and must be reinterpreted in terms of smaller mechanisms of change. First, reanalysis presupposes ambiguity, yet the historical record shows that *for...to*-infinitives did not emerge in the syntactic environments that gave most occasion to ambiguity: ambiguous instances are found in predicand positions, as in (1a-b) above, but the earliest *for...to*-infinitives are adjuncts, as in (2a). Second, the ambiguities found in the data are not always discrete but may involve semantic gradience or vagueness (Bolinger 1977; Coates 1983; Cruse 2000): for example, the *for*-NP in (2b) is neither obviously benefactive (*folly* does not normally take benefactive *for*-NPs) nor is it straightforwardly non-benefactive (it is still the master who is accountable for the folly). Third, the reanalysis account cannot explain why the earliest *for...to*-infinitives are, as in (2a), almost all passive.

- (2) a. Moyses at all tymes had recourse to þe tabernacle for doutes & questions to be asoiled, & fled to þe helpe of praier for releuing of perels
 b. yt ys gret foly for a master to put a seruant to that besynes wherof he can nothing skylle

In light of this an alternative account is proposed, arguing that *for...to*-infinitives developed separately in adjunct and predicand positions. The development of adjunct *for...to*-infinitives starts from an older infinitive construction with OV order and with the infinitival reinforcement *for* as in (3a). As a result of analogical pressure, this pattern was made to conform to the new SVO word order by passivisation (Fischer 1991), which explains the preva-

lence of passives among the earliest instances of *for...to*-infinitives (as in (2a) above). By contrast, the development of predicand *for...to*-infinitives occurred gradually through small-step semantic extensions involving (i) the shift from participant-internal to participant-external modality in examples like (3b) (Goossens 2000), and (ii) gradual analogical extensions in the kind of predicates that the construction allowed (e.g. *unlawful* > *improper* > *folly*), resulting in the ‘hybrid’ patterns illustrated in (2b) above (Tuggy 1993; Israel 1996).

- (3) a. men must suffere for better to haue
 b. Whose face is not seemely, it is vnpossible for him for to haue good manners

Thus, the alternative analysis shows how a grammaticalisation-like change can be broken down into smaller mechanisms, highly sensitive to the specific linguistic patterns available in a language at a given time (Fischer 2007), and firmly based in the usage-based approach, involving analogy (Hopper 1987; Croft 2000) and gradual semantic change (Langacker 1987).

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