

## Mere speculation? Criteria for the “grammaticalizedness” of attributive adjectives

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Privative adjectives, defined here as adjectives expressing the absence of a certain quality or attribute, often come to be used as intensifiers historically (mostly downtoners in the sense of Quirk et al. 1985). Examples are English *mere*, *bare*, *sheer*, *pure*; German *lauter*, *eitel*, *bloß*, *rein*; or Dutch *louter*. With some of these adjectives, the privative reading has become obsolete (e.g. *mere*, *sheer*), whereas with others both the privative and the intensifier reading is attested synchronically (e.g. *pure*, *rein*).

The case of German *lauter* is insofar exceptional, as it is used as a quantifying determiner in Present Day German (PDG), which can be paraphrased as ‘(too) many/much, only’ (cf. (1) and (2)), i.e. it is clearly grammaticalized, whereas the downtoner *lauter*, from which it developed, disappeared from the language in Early New High German (ENHG).

- (1) Neunzig Prozent der Programme bestehen aus lauter Blödsinn.  
[Ninety percent of the programmes are lauter ‘only’ rubbish.]  
DWDS: die tageszeitung 14.06.1996, S. 2
- (2) Wie armselig nimmt sich da der Leserbrief des Erfurter CDU-Bundestagsabgeordneten Norbert Otto aus, der ‘vor lauter Arbeit keine Zeit für Parlamentsdebatten’ hat.  
[How pathetic is the letter to the editor by the member of the Bundestag Norbert Otto, who has ‘no time for parliamentary debates because of too much work’.]  
DWDS: Süddeutsche Zeitung 16.02.1994, S. 60

Using data from diachronic corpora we discuss the micro-processes involved in the grammaticalization of *lauter* from an adjective with the meaning ‘unmixed’ into the PDG quantifying determiner via the downtoner ‘nothing better than’ (synonymous with English *mere*) (cf. also Eckardt 2006). During ENHG the inflection of attributive adjectives, i.e. concord with the head noun, started to become obligatory. Contrary to this general development however, *lauter* was still frequently used uninflected for phonological and rhythmic reasons (cf. Wilmans 1909; Solms/Wegera 1991). These uses, as will be shown, were the prerequisite for the reanalysis and following grammaticalization of *lauter*.

We then ask whether the intensifier uses of privative adjectives in attributive position should also be regarded as cases of grammaticalization and of subjectification in grammaticalization. Based on the analysis of data from synchronic corpora we attempt to establish criteria for the degree of “grammaticalizedness” of the forms as they are used now. We discuss the following criteria for “grammaticalizedness”: (i) use of the adjective in predicative position; (ii) gradability; (iii) use in comparison; (iv) use with abstract nouns; (v) position within the premodifying string. Here Adamson (2000) has argued that subjectification in the NP goes along with a shift to the left in the premodifying string; (vi) restriction to certain patterns in the sense of Sinclair (1991, 1998); and, for German, (vii) concord with the head noun.

### Corpora

BK: Bonner Frühneuhochdeutschkorpus (<http://www.ikp.uni-bonn.de/dt/forsch/fnhd>)

BNC: British National Corpus (<http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk>)

DWDS: Corpus of the Electronic Dictionary of German (<http://www.dwds.de>)

MHDBDB: Mittelhochdeutsche Begriffsdatenbank (<http://mhdbdb.sbg.ac.at>)

OED: Oxford English Dictionary (<http://www.oed.com>)

PCEEC: Parsed Corpus of Early English Correspondence (<http://ota.ahds.ac.uk>)

## References

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