

Twenty years of relational preverbs: a grammaticalization account

Colette Grinevald and Caroline Imbert (University of Lyon 2)

The purpose of this talk is to present a new analysis of interesting facts of Homeric Greek that had not been identified as such in the numerous grammars of this well-known ancient language – an analysis arrived at on the basis of similar facts of Amerindian languages. It will be argued also that this new analysis of Homeric Greek strengthens in return initial proposals based on data of contemporary oral-tradition languages.

The topic of this talk is the morphosyntactic category of so-called “relational preverbs”, a category proposed tentatively twenty years ago in Craig & Hale (1988) to account for data from various Amerindian languages (Navajo, Winnebago, Nadëb and Rama).

The talk will first revisit the arguments presented then, to establish that these relational preverbs emerge from the grammaticalization of postpositions through various steps of discourse cliticization, syntactic incorporation, leading sometimes to lexicalization of new verb forms. The talk will then show how such an analysis of relational preverbs can clarify a blind spot of the grammar of Homer’s language, an otherwise well-described dead language. The newly proposed description of verbal prefixation in Homeric Greek as “relational preverbs” will follow three steps. First, it argues for a similar postpositional origin and then shows that several layers of the grammaticalization of postpositions into relational preverbs coexist in synchrony. Second, the talk will demonstrate that all these preverbs belong specifically to the semantic domain of space and will show that they exhibit possible multiple prefixation. Finally, it will underline how this multiple prefixation of Homeric relational preverbs obeys strict affix order constraints, to then draw an interesting parallel with a case of similarly fixed order of spatial verb satellites, again from Amerindian data – this time from a Mayan language.

The talk will then review the case of the directionals of Jakaltek Popti’ Mayan, originally described ten years ago in Craig (1993). Craig pointed out how these Path “directionals” result from a process of grammaticalization of motion verbs, a phenomenon found in most Mayan languages. In Jakaltek Popti’, the process of grammaticalization is particularly advanced and the directionals are now verbal suffixes, and the study of their possible combinations shows that there are clear semantic constraints in the order of these morphemes.

To conclude, the analysis of Homeric Greek, an ancient language known entirely from writings, benefits from early works on relational preverbs in spoken, endangered and contemporary Amerindian languages. At the same time, it reinforces those early works written in a somewhat tentative tone. In addition, the consideration of affix order constraints, taken in the early perspective of the West Coast functionalists (Bybee, 1985), shows interesting mirror-image orderings between Homeric Greek and a Mayan language, pointing in the direction of some possible functional and cognitive constraints of Path coding strategies.

In a broader perspective, this talk is in direct continuation of the early meetings on grammaticalization and takes stock of the ground covered. It also wants to remember the early beginnings of a systematic attention to processes of grammaticalization for the production of comprehensive linguistic descriptions.

Bybee, J. L. 1985. *Morphology. A study of the relation between meaning and form.*

Typological Studies in Language 9, John Benjamins.

Craig, C. and Hale, K. 1988. “Relational preverbs in some languages of the Americas: Typological and historical perspectives”. In *Language*, 64:2, pp. 312-344.

- Craig, C. 1993. "Jakaltek directionals : their meaning and discourse function". In *Languages of the World*, 7:2, pp. 23-36.
- Imbert, C. 2007. "Path coding and Relational Preverbs in Homeric Greek. A Native American story". *Association for Linguistic Typology - 7th Biennial Meeting (ALT VII)*, Paris, 25-28 September 2007.

Examples

- (1) Relational preverb (in bold) cliticization in Rama (Craig & Hale, 1988:323)
 suli-kaas () **yú**-nsu-auk-kama
 animal-meat () **pv**/with-we-roast-sub
 'For us to roast meat **with** (it / the spoon)
- (2) Relational preverb (in bold) syntactic incorporation in Rama (Craig & Hale, 1988:325)
 praanti **yú**-i-siik-u
 plantain **pv**/with-3-come-asp
 'He brings plantain'
- (3) Mirror-image ordering constraints in:
 - a. Homeric Greek multiple prefixes (Imbert, 2007)
eis – *ana* – *baíno*:
 to – up – walk
 'Walk up to'
Goal – Orientation – V
 - b. Jakaltek Popti' Mayan directionals (Craig, 1993)
xta'wi – *ay* – **tij**
 responded – down – toward
 'Answered down toward'
V – Orientation – Goal