

Cross-linguistic data as evidence for grammaticalisation

Anne-Marie Simon-Vandenbergen and Dominique Willems (Ghent University)

Grammaticalisation is a process of historical change which involves a number of shifts. Traugott (1997: 13-14 [1995]) mentions the following shifts: (i) decategorialisation, (ii) bonding within the phrase, (iii) phonological reduction, (iv) increase of polysemies, (v) increase of pragmatic functions, (vi) subjectification (increasing association with speaker attitude). These criteria need not all be fulfilled, however, for grammaticalisation to take place. There may be grammaticalisation without subjectification, for instance. In the case of adverbs which have developed into discourse markers some criteria are clearly fulfilled (i.e. increasing polysemy, increasing pragmatic role and subjectification), while others are not. Especially bonding is problematical, since discourse markers actually have a wider rather than narrower scope. Also decategorialisation is not clear in all cases.

The question we want to raise in this paper is what sort of evidence there is for regarding adverbs such as English *actually* or *in fact* as cases of grammaticalisation. We want to show that a combination of synchronic and diachronic monolingual and contrastive corpora provides the best evidence. While both synchronic and diachronic monolingual corpora have been used in most studies on grammaticalisation, contrastive data have not been used to the same extent, and have – to the best of our knowledge – been referred to as valuable evidence in a few studies only (but see e.g. Noël 2003). It is our aim to show that contrastive synchronic and diachronic research on cognate words in English and French throws light on when and how processes of change take place.

The English words *actually* and *in fact* and their French cognates are taken as a case study to illustrate the methodological and theoretical issues. In the case of *actually/actuellement* the synchronic analysis of monolingual and translation corpora shows very distinct, almost homonymic, semantic values in the two languages: an almost exclusively temporal meaning for French *actuellement*, very polysemic uses as discourse marker for English *actually*. The diachronic analysis, however, yields a quite different picture, with the “reality” meaning as a starting point for both languages. While this meaning is dominant in English, giving rise to various pragmatic extensions, XVth century French favours the deictic temporal meaning extension, giving rise only very recently to more pragmatic uses (often described as “anglicisms” (cf. “Ce sens archaïque de “réellement” serait sans doute senti aujourd’hui comme un anglicisme”) (Grand Robert).

This case study illustrates clearly the advantages of using contrastive evidence in the description of the grammaticalization process: it allows us to recover links between meanings and get a more complete view on the different stages of the process. Our contribution aims at focusing on the methodological and theoretical aspects of the question.

References

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